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FROM THE
BEGINNING



MRS. G. E. MORTON.



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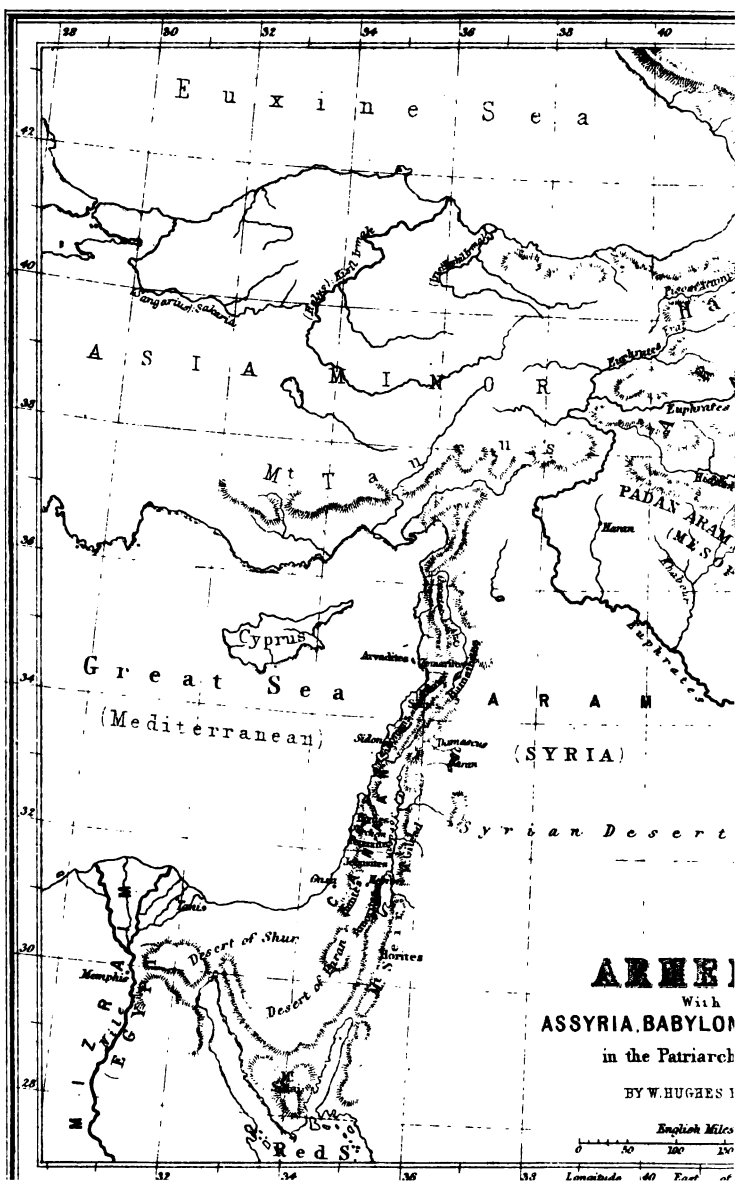


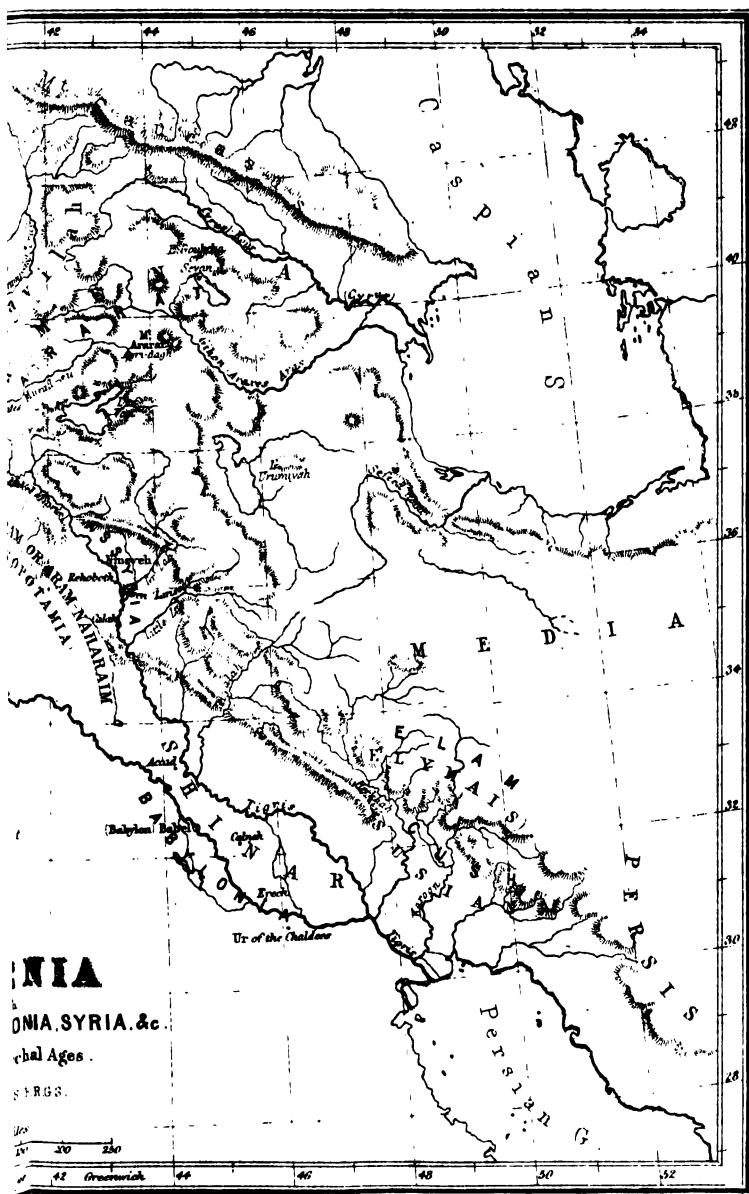


FROM THE BEGINNING,

OR

STORIES FROM GENESIS.







FROM THE BEGINNING,

OR

STORIES FROM GENESIS.

For Little Children.

BY

MRS. G. E. MORTON,

AUTHOR OF 'THE STORY OF JESUS,' 'EIGHTY YEARS AGO,'
'FRIEND IN NEED PAPERS,' ETC. ETC.



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This Book is Dedicated

TO

ALL DEAR CHILDREN, AND TO MY OWN DEAR LITTLE ONES

IN PARTICULAR ;

WITH THE EARNEST PRAYER THAT IT MAY TEACH THEM

TO LOVE THAT BEST OF BOOKS

FROM WHENCE THESE STORIES ARE TAKEN.



PREFACE.

THE object of this little work is to tell in simple language, suited to the capacity of young children, what God has revealed to us in the Book of Genesis, of the Creation of our World ; and to give the interesting stories of the Patriarchs in a connected form.

Bible Story-books have been written, each taking up one or more of these narratives ; but there is not one, as far as I am aware, which professes to give them in their entirety.

It has often been remarked, that all attempts to paraphrase the Bible have invariably failed. Even where the paraphrase has been of a doctrinal part—as one of St. Paul's Epistles, for example—the

failure has been conspicuous. But it becomes still more marked if we attempt to tell the beautiful stories of the Bible in any other than Bible language. Their beauty, their simplicity, their wonderful graphic power, seem at once to disappear. Bearing this always in mind, I have endeavoured as much as possible to keep to the words of the original; only altering them where the alteration seemed necessary to convey the true meaning to the mind of the young child.

H. M.

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FROM THE BEGINNING.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST DAYS.

IN the beginning God created—or made—the heaven and the earth.

In the beginning! It is so difficult, so impossible to picture to ourselves a time so long ago; a time when there was no heaven and no earth, and no created thing—when there was only God. God was from everlasting; He was the first of all things. From the beginning, *before* the beginning, there was God.

We cannot understand it; it is too strange and difficult for any one to understand; but we know it to be true. And how do we know it? I will tell you.

A wonderful Book has been written, which gives us an account of these things. It does not tell us all we should like to know, but it tells us all that it is necessary for us to know. It tells us of things God has thought about, of things He has said, and

things He has done ; such marvellous things that, as we read about them, we can only think, How great God is ! how wise ! how good !

But how do we know this Book is true ?

Because God, who is The Truth, has written it Himself ; that is, He has put His Spirit into holy men, and told them what to say. He wished the story of His doings to be known to men, that they might learn to fear, and honour, and obey Him. And He wished the story of His love, and power, and goodness to be told also, that men might learn to love and trust Him.

This wonderful Book, then, that we call the Bible, is God's own message to us. In it He speaks to us, and tells us how He made the world, and how He made man. In it He tells us, too, how sin and death came into the world because of man's disobedience ; and how He planned a way by which sin might be forgiven, and the pardoned sinner might have everlasting life.

God was not alone when He made the world. His Son Jesus Christ was with Him, for He was always with the Father, and nothing was made without Him. The Holy Spirit was there too ; God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are one God.

Do you know what is the shape of this earth on which we live ? It is round like a ball ; but it was not so at first. God *could* have made it perfect and beautiful all at once, but He chose to do it by degrees—that means, by little and little. So, when

first He made the world it was without form—shapeless and all in confusion, and empty, and bare. It was all in darkness, too, and covered with water ; but the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

Then God made the light. He had only to speak, and the thing He willed was done. He said,—

‘ Let there be light.’

And there was light ; and God saw that it was good. Then He divided the light from the darkness, and called the light Day ; and the darkness He called Night.

This was the end of the first Day. God had made the world and the light ; but there was still much more to do before the earth was made as beautiful as it is now.

The next thing God made was the air. You know we could not live without air, neither could animals or plants. We breathe every moment, and at each breath we take, we draw air into our bodies ; if there were no air, we must die. The air is all around us, and is everywhere. The wind is air, and you often hear the noise it makes as it rushes quickly along, making the branches of the trees wave and dance, and shaking every little leaf and blade of grass.

Afterwards God made the clouds, which, as you know, are full of water. I dare say you have often watched and admired them, as the winds have blown

them swiftly across the sky. Sometimes the setting sun tinges them with lovely colours—gold, and orange, and purple—and then the colours change, and the forms of the clouds change, and there is always some fresh beauty in them. How useful the clouds are, too, when they fall in gentle showers! how they refresh the dry and thirsty ground, and revive the drooping plants!

This was the end of the second Day.

You remember I told you that the earth was all covered with water; but on the morning of the third Day God said,—

‘Let the waters that are on the earth be all gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear.’

He had prepared a deep place for the waters to remain in; and at His word they rushed down into the place He had made for them. And God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering together of the waters He called Seas. And God said to the sea,—

‘So far you may come, but no further; and here shall your proud waves be stayed.’

So, though the sea is never still, and though the waves are always tossing about, and dashing themselves against the rocks and on the shore, yet they can never move out of the place where God has put them; for He has said, ‘Stay there.’

Then God spoke to the earth. He said, ‘Let grass grow out of the ground, and all manner

of plants, and trees, and all kinds of pleasant fruits.'

And it was so. At His word the soft green grass spread like a beautiful carpet over the bare ground, and multitudes of lovely flowers came into bloom. You know the names of many of the flowers—daisies, of which there are such numbers in our fields, the sweet-smelling violet, roses and blue-bells, forget-me-nots, buttercups, lilies of the valley, and hundreds of other flowers.

Different kinds of corn also grew out of the earth. Wheat, from which our bread is made ; and barley, and oats, and rye ; rice, too, and many other kinds of grain which are good for food.

Then there were vegetables of all sorts, such as potatoes, carrots, turnips, brocoli, and beans.

And there were trees without number ; many of them loaded with fruit, such as apples, pears, plums, oranges, and figs. And other trees with graceful foliage and wide-spreading branches, like our oaks, elms, limes, and acacias.

This was the end of the third Day. How different the world looked now to what it had done before ! Now it was all fresh and fair and beautiful, for everything that God had made was very good.

After this God made some very bright and shining lights, and placed them up in the sky, that they might give light upon the earth.

What are these lights called ?

The greater light is called the Sun, which God makes to shine all day. We cannot always see it, because of the clouds which so often come between it and our earth ; but we know it is always shining the whole day long behind the clouds.

The Moon and the Stars God made to shine at night. The moon does not shine as brightly as the sun ; if it did, there would be no difference between the days and nights ; but God lets it be dark at night, that we may rest and sleep. Darkness is good for trees and plants, as well as for animals, and for men, women, and little children.

How many stars are there ?

No one can tell, for there are more than can be counted. God only can tell the number of them ; *He* knows each one, and calls them all by their names.

This was the end of the fourth Day. And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.

CHAPTER II.

LIVING CREATURES.

I HAVE told you of a great many things that God had done, and how by little and little He had made the world perfect and beautiful.

But all this time the earth was very quiet and still. There was no noise—no sound at all to be heard in it—except when the wind blew strongly, whistling through the trees and shrubs, and making them rustle and shake, sometimes with a sort of low moaning.

And there would be the sound of falling or rushing water, as little streams and broad rivers ran quickly over their pebbly beds down to the sea. While on the ocean itself (the ocean, you know, is another name for the sea) there was always the noise of the restless waves, as they moved up and down, and rolled and tossed themselves about, without being one moment still.

Except for such sounds as these the earth was quite silent.

But on the fifth Day God continued His grand work of creation. He now began to make living creatures ; and first of all He spoke to the sea. He said,—

'Let the sea bring forth abundantly'—that means, in great quantity—'living things that move about and that creep ; and let birds fly about over the earth and up in the air.'

Then God made great sea monsters ; huge and wonderful creatures many of them, such as have not been seen for many thousands of years, for they do not exist now. He made the great whale, and creeping things—sea-insects and larger creatures, such as lizards and crocodiles, which can live either in the water or on the land. And fishes of all sizes—some very large indeed, and others quite tiny—were swimming about in the rivers, lakes, and seas.

But more lovely than any of these things were the beautiful birds that were now flying about everywhere ; perching in the trees, singing amongst the branches, and filling the air with the music of their sweet songs and joyous chirping and twittering.

You know the names of a great many birds. The dear little robin that sings a cheerful, contented little song in winter, when all the other birds are silent ; the blackbird and the thrush that warble so sweetly on summer evenings ; and the little brown sparrow, that is just as brisk and happy in the town as in the country. Those birds that have the brightest and gayest plumage live in very hot countries ; such as the bird of paradise, the lyre bird, the tiny humming bird, and many others of which you have no doubt seen pictures.



Some birds, as you know, can be made to talk—jackdaws, parrots, and others. And some birds like to swim about on the water, like swans, and ducks, and geese. Then there is the owl, with its large eyes and wise-looking face; it sleeps all day, but wakes up at night, and flies about. But I have not time to tell you more about the beautiful birds.

This was the end of the fifth Day. And God blessed all the living creatures that He had made.

You remember God had spoken to the *sea* to bring forth the living creatures of which I have just told you. Now, on the sixth Day, He spoke to the *ground*, and said,—

‘Let the earth bring forth living creatures—creeping things, and cattle, and beasts.’

And it was so. When God spoke, different kinds of animals came out of the earth, and creeping things, and little insects also. What a wonderful sight it must have been! And does it not show us something of how great and glorious God is, when we think of the way this world was made, and all that is in it? He had but to speak, and the thing He commanded was instantly done.

As God made the waters to bring forth huge sea monsters, so he made the ground to bring forth some enormous animals. They were exceedingly large—much larger even than the elephant. Do you not wish you could have seen them? But thousands of years ago they ceased to exist; and it is only by the bones of some of them having

been discovered, that we know these huge and wonderful creatures once lived on our earth.

So the world was now completely finished, and stored with all manner of beautiful and wonderful things. The sea and the land were full of God's glory, for His mighty works were everywhere ; and His 'tender mercies are over all His works.'

This shows that God is a God of love. He cares for all the creatures He has made ; He holds up the sun, moon, and stars that they should not fall ; He feeds the lions and the wild beasts ; He gives food to the birds, watching even the little sparrows, that not one shall fall to the ground without His will.

If God cares so much for the things He has made, do you not think it must grieve and displease Him when He sees any one wilfully hurting or injuring what He *made and cares about* ?

Indeed it does. But children are often cruel to insects. They torture flies and beetles, and think it does not matter. They throw stones at cats and other dumb animals, and do not see much harm in it ; and in many ways they cause a great deal of pain to helpless and harmless creatures.

But God sees it all ; He is watching all the time. Have you ever thought it was displeasing to God ? A cruel boy will grow up a cruel man ; and God hates cruelty. Will you try to remember this, if you are ever tempted to hurt or tease either insects, animals, or *each other* ?

One thing God had yet to make before He



rested from His grand work of creation. On the same day that He made the earth to bring forth the living creatures, He made MAN. He spoke to His blessed Son, and said,—

‘ Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ; and let them have power over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over everything that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created man in His own image ; even in the likeness of God. He made one man and one woman.

And God blessed them ; and told them that He had given into their hands all the things that He had made, and that they were to have the mastery over all creatures both on sea and land. He told them also, that He had given them herbs and grain, and all manner of fruits for food. *Now* we eat meat—the flesh of animals—and fowls and fish ; but it was not so then. In those first days man only ate of the things that were growing out of the ground.

God’s work of creation—that wonderful work—was ended now. He had been six Days doing it ; and now it was finished. And He saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.

We do not know how long the Days were, for the word ‘day’ in the Bible does not always mean the twenty-four hours that *we* call ‘day.’ But this is of no importance ; for it is just as wonderful that

God could have made the world as He did, whether in six common days, or in six years, or in six thousand years.

On the seventh Day God rested from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh Day, and made it a holy Day, because He rested then from all His work, which He had created and made. He set it apart, that it should be used for His glory, and that is why, up to this present time, we also keep holy the seventh day.

It is very good and very helpful to have one day in seven on which we have more leisure to think about God, and about all He has done for us. *Our* Sabbath (or day of rest) is Sunday; on which day our Lord Jesus Christ rose again from the dead. So each Sabbath should remind us of two important things:—

God's wonderful greatness and power in making the world, and

God's wonderful mercy and love in sending Jesus to die for us.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL GARDEN.

THE angels in heaven were glad when God made the world. They were looking on in wonder and delight at all He was doing, and when they saw His perfect and beautiful work they sang praises together and shouted for joy.

You remember I told you that God made Adam and Eve on the sixth Day. Now I am going to tell you more about them.

Adam was made first ; and do you know *how* he was made ? God took some of the dust of the ground, and with that He made a man ; then He breathed into him the breath of life, and gave him a soul.

What is the soul ? We cannot see it, but it is within us, and it is of much more value and importance than our bodies. When our bodies die, our souls do not die ; they live still, and will go on living till that last great day when God will raise our bodies from the dead. Then the bodies, souls, and spirits of those who have died, trusting in the Lord Jesus and loving Him, will live with Him for ever in heaven. But the wicked and unbelieving, and all liars, will be cast down to hell.

Animals have no souls ; they cannot think of or understand about God. So, though man was made the same day that the beasts were, and though he was made of the same earth, yet when God gave him a soul He made him far, far above the beasts ; for He put some of His own honour upon him, and breathed some of His own life into him.

Now, the Lord God planted a garden. Have you ever thought of this before, that the first garden that was ever made on earth, was planted by God Himself ! It was called the Garden of Eden, and it was exceedingly beautiful ; for God made to grow out of the ground every tree that was bright and pleasant to look at, and that was good for food.

All the most lovely flowers were there, and all the most delicious fruits ; for God had such love and tenderness for the man whom He had created that He made everything of the sweetest and best to grow in the place which He was preparing for him. A river ran through the garden to water it. And in the midst of the garden were two wonderful trees ; one was called the tree of life, and the other was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

When all was quite ready and prepared, then the Lord God took Adam and put him into this beautiful place to take care of it, and to attend to all the flowers and plants. And God said to Adam,—

‘ You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in

the garden, except one. You must not touch the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for if you eat it you shall die.'

Adam had no thought of disobeying God. He loved Him and trusted Him; and as he had no sin, so he had no wish to do anything against his Maker's will.

And God brought to Adam in the garden every beast of the field, and every bird, to see what he would call them; and whatever he called every living creature, that was the name of it. So Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the birds, and to every beast of the field.

But Adam was all alone. He had no companion to be with him to share his happiness and to help him in his pleasant work. And God said,—

'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make a companion for him, to be his friend, and to help him.'

Then God caused Adam to fall into a deep, sound sleep; and while he slept, God opened his side and took out one of his bones. Then He closed the place again without Adam having felt any pain. And the bone which God had taken from his side He made into a woman; and He brought her to Adam.

When Adam awoke and saw her, he loved her very much. He knew that she was made of his flesh and of his bone, and that God had given her to him to be his loving friend and companion. How full his heart must have been of love and

gratitude to God who was so kind to him, and who was always thinking of him, and making everything bright and happy for him.

Just in the same way God takes care of us now. Though we so little deserve His goodness, He is always watching over us—always thinking of us. Every good we have, every blessing we enjoy, are all from Him. Dear parents, kind friends, a happy home, good food, and warm clothing, are all His gifts. Should not we love Him and thank Him for all?

Adam and Eve were so happy in the Garden of Eden. They talked to each other, and walked together, and never said a cross word to one another. They enjoyed the work that was given them to do, of taking care of their beautiful garden. They liked to examine all the lovely blossoms, and delicate mosses, and feathered grasses, and to watch the different animals and the bright winged birds. There was so much to do and to see! and they were never tired or sad. They liked, too, praising and blessing God, who had done so much for their comfort and happiness.

And God Himself used to come down in the garden sometimes, and talk to Adam and his wife. They were not afraid when they heard Him. Better than anything else they must have loved to hear His voice, for they were holy and without sin, and they knew that God was their friend.

But now I have come to a very sad part of my story; for I must tell you how sin and misery crept

into that beautiful garden, and how soon everything became changed.

You know that the angels who live in heaven are pure and holy, and always delight to do God's will. But did you know that there are *other* angels—wicked, evil spirits—who live in hell, and who hate God? Yet they were good once, and lived in heaven; but they sinned there, and grew proud and disobedient, and God turned them out of heaven.

Satan is their prince, or chief. He hates God, and is always wanting to spoil His work, and to make very *bad* what He made very *good*. He hates all that is holy and pure, and so he hated Adam and Eve, and could not bear to see them happy. He wanted to make them disobedient and wicked like himself; for he knew quite well that if he could only make them sin, sorrow and shame and misery would be sure to follow.

So one day he went into the garden to do his wicked work. He took the form of a serpent, and went to Eve, whom he found alone near the forbidden tree. He wanted to try and make her think God unkind, so he said to her,—

‘Has God said that you must not eat of every tree of the garden?’

Eve answered, ‘We *may* eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden, only we may not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden. For God said, You shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’

Then the serpent tried to make Eve doubt God's

word. He said to her, 'You shall not die; for God knows that if you eat the fruit you will become very wise.'

O foolish Eve, to listen to the wicked Tempter's lies! She ought to have stopped her ears—she ought to have turned away from him—that she might not hear his bold and daring words. But, alas! instead of doubting *him*, she began to doubt God. Perhaps the serpent was right! Perhaps God did not mean what He said! Perhaps no great harm would be done if she just tasted the fruit!

She looked at it and thought how nice it seemed. She longed to take it, and she thought what a good thing it would be if she were to become very wise. Instead of putting temptation away from her—instead of going away from the tree—she went nearer and nearer, till at last she put out her hand and plucked the fruit. Having it in her hand, she could not resist tasting it. She ate it, and gave some to her husband, and he did eat.

The one command that God had given them they disobeyed. Their souls that were so spotless before, were now stained with sin.

It did not take long to do; but the consequences will last till Time shall be no longer. Dear children, do pray earnestly to God that you may be kept from falling into sin, for you never know where the effect of even *one* wrong-doing will end. How little Eve thought that her one act of disobedience would fill the whole world with sorrow!

Poor Adam and Eve ! Their punishment began at once, for the moment they had sinned they felt fear and shame and misery. The first thing they did was to sew fig-leaves together to make themselves aprons. Till now they had had no covering for their bodies, for God had made them pure and holy, and they needed none ; but when they sinned their innocence was gone, and they wanted to hide their bodies even from God.

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day ; and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. But God called to Adam, and said,—

‘Where are you ?’

God knew where Adam and Eve were, for no one *can* hide from Him. He knew, too, what they had just been doing—why, then, did He ask them questions ?

It was to make them confess their fault with their own lips. When God asked Adam where he was, he answered,—

‘I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, and I hid myself.’

Then God said, ‘Have you eaten of the tree of which I told you not to eat ?’

Instead of humbly confessing his sin, Adam began to make excuses for himself, and to throw the blame upon his wife. ‘The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.’

Then God said to Eve, 'What is this that you have done?'

Then Eve began to make excuses also. She answered, 'The serpent persuaded me, and I did eat.'

God was very angry with them all, but He was angry most of all with the wicked serpent. He said to him, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; and you shall eat dust all your life.'

And to Eve God said, 'Because you have done this, you shall be often very weak and ill. You shall have a great deal of sorrow, and Adam shall rule over you.'

And to Adam God said, 'Because you have done this, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, saying, You shall not eat of it; cursed is the ground for your sake; you shall eat your bread in sorrow all the days of your life. And the ground shall bring forth thorns and thistles; and you shall be obliged to work hard, and to be often very tired. And you shall both die at last; for you were made of dust, and you shall return to dust again.'

I think the hearts of poor Adam and Eve would have almost broken if it had not been for a most gracious promise that God made them at this time. In spite of their disobedience, He tenderly loved them still, and He planned a way by which all their sins might be pardoned, and they might enter heaven at last. What way was that?

It was through the precious blood of Jesus. He told them that a Saviour would one day be born, who should suffer and die for guilty men, that so He might win for them everlasting life, and might give them a fairer place than the Garden of Eden to live in—even heaven itself! This gracious promise, and this bright hope, must have comforted Adam and Eve in their sorrow and disgrace. Though they were to have grief and pain upon earth, they had the blessed hope of an eternity of joy in heaven.

Like a loving father, God not only provided for the wants of their souls, He also took care of their bodies; for He made coats of skins for them, and clothed them. This was far better than their own poor covering of leaves. Yet beasts had to be killed to supply these garments for them; and this was another sad result of Adam's sin.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST CHILDREN.

ADAM and Eve were not allowed to remain any longer in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. The tree of life was there, and God would not let them touch it now ; for if they had eaten the fruit of it, they would have lived for ever ; and God had said that they *must die*. So God drove out the man and his wife from the beautiful garden, and would never let them enter it again. And for fear they should do so (for God could not trust in their promise of obedience any more), He placed some bright angels there with a flaming sword, to keep the way of the tree of life.

I think, whenever Adam and Eve looked towards that garden where they had been so happy, and where the bright cherubim were guarding the way of the tree of life, the thought of God's promise must have been like balm to their aching hearts ! *Another* way of life was opened to them, *another* paradise was promised, and they would live once more in the presence of God and of His holy angels without fear ! But that could not be till their life on earth was ended.



Real hard work was Adam's portion now. He had to dig the ground, and work very hard, to get the herbs, and the grain, and fruit to grow. God had made everything that was good for food to grow for them in the garden ; but *outside* it was all quite different. Adam had to clear away briars and thistles, and to dig up the hard ground ; and he was often hot and tired, and, oh ! so sad, too, as he remembered that all this pain and trouble were of their own making.

After some time a new happiness came to Adam and his wife—a little baby-boy was born ! the first baby that the world ever saw. Eve must have almost forgotten her sorrow for the time, in the joy of clasping her little treasure in her arms ; for, ah ! how could she know the dreadful grief this child would one day cause her ?

She gave him the name of Cain ; and perhaps she thought that this was the promised Deliverer who was to save His people from their sins ; but if so, she must very soon have found out how greatly she was mistaken.

Afterwards another baby - boy was born, to whom his parents gave the name of Abel. We do not know anything about the childhood of these two little brothers ; but we are quite sure that Adam and Eve were very careful to teach them about the living God, and that they tried to bring them up to love and obey Him. We are quite sure that they must often have told their children about their happy life in the beautiful

garden, and about the sin which caused them to be shut out from it; and they would, without doubt, warn their little boys against listening to Satan, and doing his will.

When they grew old enough to help their parents, Cain was made to dig the ground like his father; and Abel was made to take care of sheep. They were not allowed to be idle—they had to work hard for their daily bread.

At last the time came when they might offer sacrifices like their parents. But now I must explain to you what a sacrifice was.

When Adam and Eve had been driven from Eden, God wished them always to remember their sin and His promise of a Saviour. So He told them that, from time to time, they must kill a lamb, to remind them that they were sinners and deserved to die, and to remind them also of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who should one day be slain in their stead, and whose precious blood should take away the sins of the world.

Cain and Abel knew the meaning of the sacrifice, and they knew all that it was intended to remind them of.

Now Abel was humble and obedient, and he loved God, and believed in His promises. He knew himself to be a sinner, and he was sorry for his sins; so he brought a lamb—the best of the flock—and offered it up to the Lord, thinking of His promise, and thanking Him for His goodness.

But what did Cain do? He brought some of the fruit of the ground, as an offering to God; but he brought no lamb. He would not confess himself to be a sinner, but was proud, and disobedient, and unbelieving. He would not take God's way of drawing near to Him, but chose a way of his own.

So God was not pleased with Cain, and He did not like his offering. But He was pleased with Abel, and with his sacrifice, because he showed a humble faith and a loving, trusting heart.

When Cain saw that God was pleased with Abel, and not with himself, and that God accepted his brother's offering, and not his own, he was very angry; and his face changed, and looked sullen and evil. He was angry with God, and he was angry with his brother, too, and hated him, because he was good.

But God was very kind and patient, and He spoke gently to Cain, and asked him, 'Why are you angry? and why do you look so cross? If you do what is right, I will receive you; but if you will not do what is right, it is because sin is in you. Yet you may get the mastery over sin.'*

But Cain would take no heed to what God said. He would not confess that he was wicked, nor would he bring a lamb for a sin-offering. Instead of doing so, he went on indulging in evil, jealous tempers—listening to Satan's voice and not God's—till, at last, it led him to do a most dreadful thing. He was talking one day to his brother in

* Rom. vi. 14.

the field, when, all at once, he got up and killed his good brother Abel.

As soon as he had done the awful deed, he went quickly away out of the field, for he could not bear to remain a moment near such a terrible sight. But God called to him, and said, 'Where is your brother Abel?'

And wicked Cain answered boldly, 'I do not know; is it my business to take care of my brother?'

Then God said, 'What have you done? I see your brother's blood poured out upon the ground. And now you are cursed; and from this time, when you dig the ground it shall not prosper with you as much as it has done before; and you shall go away from here, and from your father and mother, and you shall not have quietness or peace any more.'

Then Cain began to complain. He was not sorry for his *sin*, but he was sorry for the trouble and disgrace it had brought upon him. He said to the Lord, 'My punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, Thou hast driven me away from my home this day, and I shall be hid from Thy face; and I shall wander about, and it shall come to pass that if people find me, they will slay me.'

He knew that he deserved to die for killing his innocent brother, who had never harmed him or been unkind to him, and his guilty conscience made him afraid. But God was very patient and long-suffering with him even yet. He gave him time to

repent of all his wickedness—but we never hear that he *did* repent.

So God said to Cain, 'You shall not be killed.' And He put a mark on Cain, to prevent any one who might find him from killing him.

We do not know what the mark was that God set on Cain ; but we may be quite sure that every one who saw it knew that he was a murderer, but that God would not allow him to be put to death.

Then Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and lived in a place a great way off.

So poor Adam and Eve lost both their sons in one day!—one was dead and the other had run away. Oh, what a day of misery that must have been! Perhaps they were waiting for their sons to come home that evening, before they knew what had happened ; and then, perhaps, Adam and Eve went out to look for them.

'Where is Cain?' (they must have thought) ; 'he is not tilling the ground—he is not digging or planting! And where is Abel? he is not with the sheep.'

But, ah ! what is that upon the ground, lying so still ? They go up to it with a dreadful fear in their hearts—it is their own dear Abel. And he is dead, quite dead—cold and stiff ; and a pool of blood is on the ground—some one has killed him ! Adam and Eve must have guessed it all then ; for they must have known how jealous Cain was of his younger brother ; they must have guessed quite well whose hand had done the wicked, cowardly

deed ; and they could understand now that the murderer had fled, and that very likely they would never see their first-born son again.

Poor Adam and Eve ! How they must have grieved and cried over the lifeless form of their darling boy ! This was the first dead body they had ever seen, and it must have reminded them so bitterly of their own sin, as they saw the fearful consequence of giving way to wicked thoughts, and listening to Satan's evil whispers. But I think they must have grieved even more for Cain's wickedness than for Abel's death ; for they knew that the one was safe with God, but what would become of the other ?

I told you that Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, on that dreadful day when he had shed his brother's blood. That does not mean that he could hide himself from God, but that he tried to forget Him, and did not wish to walk in His ways.

But was he happy ? No ; how could he be happy when he had always in his mind the horrible thought of what he had done ? He tried to forget it, but he never could. He brought no sin-offering—he offered up no lamb—he would not ask God's pardon for his sin ; he was hardened and impenitent.

Cain did not care to serve or obey God ; he only cared to please himself and to be great. He builded a city, and called it after the name of one of his children. And some of his family, after



a great many years, began to prosper very much in worldly things. One lived in tents, and had a great number of cattle; another was a great musician, and knew how to make, and to play on, the harp and the organ; and another was able to make all manner of beautiful things in brass and iron.

They were very clever, but they were not good. They wanted to be rich, and great, and merry, but they did not want to serve the Lord; they loved the world, and they had no love for God.

CHAPTER V.

THE MAN WHO PLEASED GOD.

IN those early years of our world's history people lived to a very great age ; they lived to be several hundred years old. Adam was nine hundred and thirty years old when he died ; but long before his death—when he had lived only one hundred and thirty years—God, who is very pitiful and of tender mercy, gave him another little baby-boy ; and his parents called his name Seth.

Adam, you remember, was made in the likeness of *God*, pure and holy ; but Adam sinned, and so his child was born in his *father's* likeness—that is, with a sinful heart, needing the Saviour's precious blood before he could enter heaven.

When Seth was born his parents rejoiced, and were greatly comforted ; and Eve said, ' God has given me another boy instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.'

She felt so sure that this baby was God's own gift to them. And so he was ; for he grew up to be a good man, like his brother Abel, loving and fearing God, and walking in His ways.

And Adam had a great many children, and

grandchildren, and great-grandchildren ; and they were all taught to worship God, and to pray to Him, and to offer sacrifices. They were not like Cain's wicked family, who would not serve the Lord or fear Him ; but Adam's family, and Seth's children and grandchildren, worshipped God, and tried to please Him. Even if they did not all love Him, they all *professed* to do so, and they called themselves God's children.

When a great many years had passed away, but while Adam and Seth were still living, a little baby was born into the world, called Enoch. He was a descendant of Seth—that means, one of Seth's family ; but we do not know anything about him till he grew up and was sixty-two years old. Then, the Bible tells us, he 'walked with God.' What does that mean ?

It means that God was in *all* his thoughts ; that he loved Him, and trusted Him, with all his heart ; and that while so many others were only living to please themselves, he only lived to please God. Enoch liked to think of God, to speak to Him, and to pray to Him ; to tell Him all his wants, and all his joys and sorrows ; and he knew that God cared for him, and listened to him always.

As he grew older, he grew more and more holy. And God was greatly pleased with him, and told him so ;* and God taught him many things, and told him of things that were going to happen. So he was a prophet. He knew that Jesus Christ

* Heb. xi. 5.

would come one day to judge the world; and when he saw how wicked many of the people were, he warned them of the consequences of living in sin. He told them that they would one day have to give an account before God of all their wicked doings. He said,—

‘Behold! the Lord cometh with ten thousands of His saints to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all the hard things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.’

But we do not hear that the people paid any attention to Enoch’s warning voice.

And so three hundred years passed away, and all that time Enoch walked with God. Sons and daughters were born to him, and he lived with his family; but his heart was in heaven. And God so loved him, that He could not spare him on earth any longer. He took him—He called Enoch home.

But as Enoch had lived a more holy life than the rest, so God would not let him die like the rest. He had no illness; but God took him to heaven just as he was. Happy, happy Enoch! What a glorious change it was for him to be taken away from his earthly to his heavenly home, to be for ever in the presence of the living God, with whom he had walked so faithfully!

Adam had died some few years before this

wonderful event ; and he and Abel and Enoch were now all safe in heaven.

There was only one other man whom God honoured so highly as to take him to Himself without his first having died. Do you know who it was ? It was the prophet Elijah, who, more than two thousand years afterwards, was taken up to heaven in a chariot of fire, and with horses of fire.

Dear children, would you not like to do as Enoch did ? to walk with God, and to please Him ? Perhaps you think that you are too young to do anything to please Him now, but that when you grow bigger you will try. This is a great mistake ; for as soon as you can understand at all about God, you can please Him if you try. I will tell you how. There is a verse in the Bible which says, ' Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.' So, you see, that is one very plain and simple way in which you can please God.

Then always remember that God loves you ; and ask Him to give you His Holy Spirit, that *you* may love *Him*, and that you may be kept from sinful thoughts and sinful deeds. This will please God ; and He will surely answer your prayer, if you speak to Him from your heart, meaning what you say.

CHAPTER VI.

THE WORLD DESTROYED.

TIME went on, and a great number of years passed away. The world was getting very full of people ; but the people were growing more and more wicked. How was this ? One reason was, that those who called themselves God's children, chose for their companions those who did not love God or care to please Him ; and this made them careless, so that they very soon began to lead selfish, sinful, godless lives.

If we really love God, we should be careful not to take for our friends those who do *not* love Him ; for, by doing so, we should certainly be led into sin. We need every help on our journey to heaven, for Satan is always trying to tempt us to disobedience, and to forgetfulness of God ; and wicked companions *help Satan in his work*.

So it was in those olden days. Those who had been called the children of God, were His obedient children no longer ; and at last they became so bad that wickedness was everywhere, and the earth was full of violence. Satan was their master, and not God ; and as Satan was a murderer from the begin-

ning, so his servants became murderers, too, and thieves, and liars.

And God looked upon the earth, and He saw that the wickedness of man was very great, and that the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. Did God care? Indeed He did. Would not a tender father care if he saw his children disobedient and unthankful, and doing the things that they knew were forbidden? Like this, *only a great deal more*, God cared. He was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart. And the Lord said,—

‘I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air: for I am sorry that I made them.’

There was only one man amongst them all who pleased God, and his name was Noah. He found grace, or favour, in the eyes of the Lord; for he was a good man, and would have nothing to do with the sinful deeds of all the people who were living in those days. He ‘walked with God,’ as Enoch had done; and he had brought up his children wisely and well.

So God spoke to Noah, and told him what He was going to do. He said, ‘Behold! I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy by drowning everything that breathes; and everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will take care of you, and your wife, and your sons, and your sons’ wives.’

Then He told Noah to make a very large boat, or ship, called an 'ark,' which should float upon the water when God should send down His great rain upon the earth. And into this ark of wood Noah and his family were to go, with two of every sort of living creature—fowls, and cattle, and creeping things—that they might be kept alive. And abundance of food was to be put into the ark for them all.

Noah believed everything that God had said to him, and he began at once to make the ark, as he had been told. He and his sons cut down a great many large trees, and then he got carpenters to help him to saw them into planks, or boards, and to fasten them together.

And all the time the ark was being made (for it took a great many years to build) Noah preached to the people, and warned them, as Enoch had done. He told them that God was going to drown the world for their wickedness; but they did not believe what he said. They went on eating and drinking, and pleasing themselves, and doing everything just as usual. Noah told them that they were in danger, but they only laughed at him.

And so year after year passed away. Noah still worked hard at the ark, which was to save him and his family from the great flood of waters, and he still went on preaching and warning his neighbours.

At last the great ark, which had taken a hundred and twenty years to make, was quite finished, and was looking like a huge and curiously-built

house in the open fields. There was no sign of any flood yet; the sun rose every morning and set every evening, and the people went on just in their old ways, not believing that any change was coming.

Then the Lord said to Noah, 'Come into the ark, you and all your family; for you have walked uprightly before Me in the midst of a wicked people. And take with you two and two of every beast, and bird, and creeping thing. For in seven days I will cause it to rain upon the earth—the rain shall last for forty days and forty nights, and every living thing that I have made I will destroy from off the face of the earth.'

You see, Noah did not attempt to go into the ark till God bade him; but the moment he was told to do so, he obeyed. He went into the ark with his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives. And God made to follow him into that place of safety two and two of every sort of living creature that was upon the earth. After that, God Himself shut the door.

The people must have looked and wondered as they saw all these things; and I dare say some of them thought, 'Suppose Noah has told us right, and suppose after all it should be true that the world shall be drowned!' But if for a moment they felt uncomfortable about it, all fear quickly passed away.

God still waited seven days, as He had said, to give them time to repent; for He is slow to anger,



and He does not like to be obliged to punish. But they took no heed ; these last seven days were spent just like all the rest, and the day of grace was past!

Then the rain came down—such rain as has never been seen upon the earth, either before or since. It poured down unceasingly, night and day, for forty days, and the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and the rivers and streams overflowed their banks. God, who had said to the sea, ‘ So far shalt thou go and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed,’ now commanded the sea to spread over the earth again, to help in the work of destruction.

Oh, how the people must have wished that they had listened to the holy preacher! How they must have wished that they had turned to God while they had the opportunity, and that they had given up their evil deeds! They had no time to think of repentance *now* ; their only thought was how they might save themselves from being drowned. But it was too late.

The water came rushing into the houses, and the frightened people fled to the upper rooms. But there was no escape ; the waters mounted higher and higher, and the upper rooms were soon reached and flooded—and all who were in them were drowned.

Some climbed up into high trees ; but before long the top branches were reached, and those who were clinging there, drenched with rain and sick with fear, were swept away into the flood. Some,

no doubt, tried to escape in boats ; but that tremendous rain and the rushing flood quickly overturned them, and the despairing people sank in the deep water.

And so the flood prevailed exceedingly upon the earth, till at last all the high hills were completely covered. And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing ; and every man, and every woman, and every child. All, all were drowned !

But where was Noah ? Safe in the ark—safe in God's keeping. As the flood rose, so the ark rose too, floating securely upon that great mass of waters. Just eight persons were saved, and no more ; there were only eight among all the people on the earth who believed that God would do as He had said.

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark ; and God made the rain to cease, and He caused a wind to pass over the earth, to help to dry up the waters. Every day the water became less and less, but it was a long time yet before the earth was dry.

When half a year had passed away, the ark rested on the top of a high mountain called Ararat ; and little by little the waters sank lower and lower, till at last all the tops of the mountains were seen.

Noah wanted very much to know if the earth

was getting dry again ; for though there was a window in the ark, it was so placed that he could not see anything out of it except the sky.* He could open it, however ; and so one day he took a raven and let it out through the window. But the raven did not come back ; it flew backwards and forwards over the water, and rested on the top of the ark, but it would not go into it again.

Then Noah sent out a dove, which is a very gentle bird—very different to the wild and fierce raven. But the dove found no tree on which she could perch, and no place where she could rest, so she flew back to the ark ; and Noah was watching for her, and when he saw her come back, he put out his hand and took her gently in through the window.

After this, Noah waited one week, and then he sent out the dove again. The gentle bird did not come back quite so soon this time. She remained away till the evening ; and when she returned to the ark, what do you think she had in her beak ? An olive leaf that she had plucked off a tree ! Noah was so pleased to see it, for he knew by this that the flood of waters had almost gone.

Yet again Noah waited a week ; and once more he sent out his little dove. But she never came back again.

Then Noah took off the covering of the ark,

* No doubt God had so ordered it, out of tenderness and pity for Noah ; that his soul should not be harrowed by the painful sight of a drowned and drowning people.

and looked out ; and, behold, the ground was dry. How he must have longed to go out, and to walk about again on the fresh and beautiful earth ! But much as he longed to do so, he did not attempt to leave the ark till God should tell him he might. God Himself had shut the door, and Noah would not open it without His leave.



So he waited patiently there eight weeks longer, till at last the joyful order came. God said to Noah,—

‘Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons, and your sons’ wives with you. And bring out with you every living thing that is with you in the ark—birds, and cattle, and every creeping thing.’

How glad they must all have been to tread on the soft green grass again, after having been shut up in the ark for a whole year ! It was like a new world now. But what a solemn thought it was, that since Noah had last put his foot upon the ground, every soul except himself and his family had been drowned in that flood of waters ! All his acquaintances and his neighbours were dead.

As Noah thought of all this, he felt so thankful to God for his great deliverance. He builded an altar—that is, he made a heap of stones—and upon this heap, or altar, he offered a sacrifice to the Lord.

And God was pleased ; and He blessed Noah and his sons, as He had blessed Adam and Eve in the beginning. And He told Noah that he should be master over all the beasts, and over every living thing upon the earth. Also, He now gave him permission for the first time to eat flesh. He said,—

‘Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you ; even as the green herb have I given you all things.’

Afterwards, God made a very gracious promise to Noah and to his sons. He said to them, ‘I will never again destroy the earth by a flood of waters ; but as long as the world lasts, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease. And I will give you a sign that I will remember My promise. I do put My bow in the cloud, and when I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be seen in the cloud. And *you* shall look at it, and *I* will look at it and remember the promise I have made you.’

You have often seen the beautiful rainbow, with all its lovely colours, stretching across the heavens after a shower ; but have you ever thought that, whenever it was there, God was looking at it, and was remembering His promise to Noah hundreds and hundreds of years ago ?

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNFINISHED TOWER.

WHEN Noah and his three sons, with their wives, had come out of the ark, they had again to begin and dig the ground, and to take care of the sheep and cattle, as they had done before. The ground that had been cursed because of Adam's sin still brought forth briers and thistles; and though the earth was once again so fresh and beautiful, Noah and his sons had to work hard for their daily food.

Noah was an husbandman, or farmer. He dug the ground, and sowed corn, and gathered in the grain at the time of harvest. He planted a vineyard, too. Do you know what a vineyard is? It is a plot of ground where only vines are planted. Grapes are the fruit that grows on the vines; and it is from grapes that wine is made. And Noah made wine from the grapes that grew in his vineyard.

One day Noah spoke to his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and prophesied, or foretold, to them what should happen to their children's children in the far-off time in the future. He blessed Shem, and he blessed Japheth, and he

told them that they should both be prosperous and great nations ; but he cursed Ham, and said that his family should not be great, but should be mean and despised, and that he should be 'a servant of servants.'

Just at first the children of Ham, like the children of wicked Cain, seemed to prosper. One of his family was called Nimrod, and he became a very great man. He was a great hunter, and a great builder ; and he made himself a kind of king. He built a great many cities, and he ruled over them. Then there was Canaan, another of Ham's family. He had a number of children, and they were very rich, and their country was very pleasantly situated ; but yet, like all the descendants of Ham, they were wicked. God's curse was upon them, and they could not, and did not, prosper in the end. The country where Canaan had settled down was called after his name—the land of Canaan ; and by-and-by you will hear how God took away that beautiful land from the wicked children of Ham, and gave it to some of the family of Shem.

The world soon began to be filled with people again after the flood, and everybody spoke the same language. Now, as you know, a great many different languages are spoken, and the people of one country cannot understand the people of another country, unless they have first, with much trouble and difficulty, learned to speak in the same language. But at the time of which I am telling you every one spoke alike.

As men began to increase in number, so they began to get careless and wicked again. They seemed so quickly to forget God, and only to care to follow their own sinful inclinations.

At first the people stayed near where the ark had rested, but as their families grew up, and more and more children were born, some of them began to journey further on till they came to a plain, or flat country, called the land of Shinar; and there they lived. After a time they said to one another,—

‘Let us build a city, and a tower whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make a name for ourselves, so that we may not be scattered abroad, or separated from each other.’

This they agreed to do. But there was no stone in that part of the country, so they were obliged to make bricks for building the city and the tower. Bricks, you know, are made of clay.

When they said that they would build a tower which should reach to heaven, they did not mean that it was possible it should reach to the place that *we* mean by heaven—where God lives; they only intended it to be so enormously high that it would look as if it reached to the skies. I dare say they thought, too, that this tower would be a place of safety for them if another flood were to come upon the earth.

They were so foolish that they did not trust in God, or in His promises; and they had forgotten about the rainbow, and what God had said about it. They were only living for themselves, and they did

not try to please God, neither did they wish to be called His children.

The plain of Shinar was a very busy place now. The people worked hard at their brick-making, and at their building; and all the time they were thinking what a grand place of safety it would be. And all the time *God was watching them*; and at last He came down to see the city and the tower which the children of men were building. God not only looked at the city and the tower, but He looked into the people's hearts, and He saw how much sin, and pride, and disobedience there was there. So He would not let them finish their work.

The Lord said, 'Behold! the people is one, and they have all one language; and now that they have begun to do this, they will stop at nothing, but will do whatever they have set their minds upon. Let us make them all speak a different language, that they may not understand each other any more.'

And God did so. The people were busy at work, as usual, one giving orders here, another arranging things there—here some were asking what they should do next, and there some were explaining how things were to be done—when, all at once, they found that they could not understand each other! They had never heard any language but their own before, and now every one was speaking what appeared to be nonsense to the other. What could it mean? I think they must

have felt that God was fighting against them, and that it was His doing. They at once left off building; for how could the workmen understand what the master was telling them to do? and how could the builder explain his orders to the masons when he was speaking in a language they had never heard before?

There was great confusion in the land of Shinar that day, and great astonishment. Their plans were all upset, they could not make each other understand, and there was so much confusion, disorder, and worry, that they called the name of the tower 'Babel,' which means Confusion.

And now the people began to separate from each other, and to spread themselves over the country. *They* wanted to keep together, but God scattered them. When their language was confounded, they did not wish to remain with those whom they could not understand. So some took their families and went in one direction, and some went in another direction, till they were all scattered. And thus it came to pass that the city and the high tower, which they thought would make them a name, and make them famous, remained unfinished.

The people had been living without God, and had been working against God; so He rose up to stop them, and to bring their work to nothing. Nothing can prosper *to the end* without God's blessing. It may seem to prosper for awhile, but it must fail sooner or later, *unless He please.*

Only those are really happy, and really safe, who trust in the Lord Jesus, and look to Him to guide and help them day by day. If God takes care of us, no power on earth can harm us. When you think of that unfinished Tower of Babel, think also of that beautiful verse in the Bible which says, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.'

Did Noah's prophecy of the blessing and the curse come true, do you think? Yes; for it was God who had told him what should happen to his sons' families. He could never have guessed what was going to happen, if God had not made it known to him.

Even to this day the curse is upon the family of wicked Ham. They live in a country called Africa, and they are a very ignorant and despised people. Their complexion—that is, the colour of their skin—is black, not white, like ours (the word 'Ham,' means black, or burnt), and they are savages. Noah said, 'A servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren;' and so, for hundreds and hundreds of years, many of them have been slaves. Even yet a great number of poor Africans are slaves.

But as the curse upon Ham has come true, just as surely has the blessing come upon Shem and Japheth. All the great and most powerful and prosperous nations of the earth belong to these two families. God's promises and threatenings *must* come to pass, for God is true.

Noah lived for a long time after the people were scattered abroad at the building of Babel. *He* was not one of those who forgot God, for he always loved and obeyed Him. I dare say he continued to live in that part of the country, near the mountain of Ararat, where the ark had rested after the flood. I am quite sure he was never weary of telling, over and over again, the wonderful story of his great deliverance; and as he preached, and warned the people *before* the flood, so he would preach to and warn them afterwards. He died at last at the great age of nine hundred and fifty years, just two years before the birth of Abram, of whom I will tell you in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FRIEND OF GOD.

AS we read God's holy Word it is very sad and strange to find how continually He was being provoked and forgotten by the people whom He had created and to whom He was so kind ; and it is very wonderful to see how patiently He bore with them.

In those early days of which I have been telling you, and even while Noah and his sons were still alive, almost all the people became idolaters, or worshippers of idols.

Do you know what an idol is? It is an image of wood or stone, or any other substance, which people make to worship, and to which they pray, and which they call a god. You would not imagine that people could be so foolish as to think that a little image of wood could hear their prayers, and could do what they wish. Yet it is true. Satan is always trying to lead men astray, and to make them believe a lie ; and even in these days in which we live, there are hundreds and hundreds of idol-worshippers.

And so some of Noah's family became idolaters.

Not only the children of wicked Ham, but even the children of Shem. And God was grieved ; for the people had left off serving Him, and they worshipped and served their false gods, or idols.

Then God determined that He would choose one man from amongst them all whom He would teach. He would speak to him, and tell him how to worship and serve Him properly, so that he might command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord, and to do justice and judgment.

Now, there was a man called Abram, who was one of Shem's family. His father was an idolater, and so were all his friends ; but God saw that Abram was faithful, and He chose him to be His servant.

God said to him, 'Go away from your country, and from your relations, and from your father's house, and go to a land that I shall show you. And I will bless you, and will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing ; and I will bless those who are good to you, and will punish those who treat you badly ; and in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'

These were wonderful words and wonderful promises that God had spoken. Did Abram believe them ? Oh, yes ; he believed every word, and he obeyed at once. He took Sarah his wife, and his nephew Lot, and all his servants and cattle, and everything that belonged to him, and went away from the place where they had been living,

to go where God should tell him. He did not the least know where he was going ; but just trusted God, day by day, to lead him.

I dare say his friends and relations wondered very much to see these preparations for a long journey, and asked him why he was leaving them, and where he was going? But all that Abram could tell them was that God (*his* God) had told him to go, but he did not know where ! No doubt they thought him very foolish to leave his home like this ; but Abram trusted God with all his heart, and was ready to obey Him in everything.

Abram had a very long way to go, and a great many miles to travel, before he came to Canaan, which was the place to which God was leading him. They journeyed during the day, and at night they pitched their tents and rested.

Have you ever seen a tent? It is a sort of small house, but with the walls and roof of strong cloth instead of stone or wood. Men fix some long poles in the ground at proper distances, and then they throw the cloth over them, and fasten it down firmly to the ground ; and instead of a door there is a curtain hanging before the entrance. At night they used to set up their tents—or pitch them, as it is called—and in the morning they would take the long sticks, or poles, out of the ground, and roll up the cloth, and then go on their way again.

At last they came to Canaan, which is a very beautiful country ; and the Lord appeared to

Abram, and said to him, 'I will give this land to your children.'

And Abram builded an altar to the Lord who appeared to him, and offered a sacrifice upon it; and called upon the name of the Lord. All the people in Canaan worshipped idols, but Abram never did.

Now God prospered Abram so much that he became very rich. He had a great number of cattle and very much silver and gold. His nephew Lot, too, was very rich, and had flocks, and herds, and tents of his own. So it happened that they really were not able to live together any longer, because between them they had too much cattle for one place. And because of this there was a great deal of quarreling between the servants of Abram and the servants of Lot. For, as they took their masters' flocks of cattle and sheep into the pasture-land to feed, they each wanted to take the best places; so they were very cross with one another and spoke angry words.

Then Abram said to Lot, 'Let there be no quarreling, I pray you, between you and me, and between your servants and my servants: for we are brothers. We have so much cattle that it is better we should separate; so you choose which part of the country you would like to live in. If you take the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if you depart to the right hand, then I will go to the left.'

How gently and kindly Abram spoke, and how unselfish he was! though he was the oldest, he let

his nephew choose which part of the country he would dwell in.

Lot was a good man, but he was not as unselfish as Abram. He looked about very carefully to see where the land seemed the best; and when he saw that all the plain of Jordan was well watered everywhere, and that it was a very beautiful country, full of trees and flowers, and grass and corn, like a beautiful garden, he said that he would live *there*. So he chose all the plain of Jordan, and he dwelt in one of the cities of the plain called Sodom.

But Lot did not make a wise choice. He thought too much about the goodness of the land, and he did not think enough of what his neighbours were like. For the men of Sodom were wicked, and sinners against the Lord exceedingly; they were impudent and daring sinners, and every day Lot was pained and distressed at all the wicked things he heard and saw in that most wicked city. Lot was a just man and righteous, and he loved God; and so it made him very unhappy to see so much sin all around him. But he ought not to have remained in Sodom, and you will see presently how God at last obliged him to leave the city.

After Lot had gone from him, God said to Abram, 'Lift up now your eyes, and look every way from the place where you are—northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward; for all the land which you see I will give to you and to your children for ever. Arise, walk through the land

in the length of it and in the breadth of it ; for I will give it unto you.'

Then Abram removed his tent, and journeyed on through the land, as God had told him to do, till he came to the plains of Mamre. There he pitched his tents again, and there he lived for many years. And he built an altar there and offered sacrifices.

God loved Abram very much, and He was pleased with him for the trust and obedience he always showed ; and Abram was called the Friend of God. Do you not think it was a great honour to be called God's friend, and would you not wish the same thing to be said of you ?

Dear children, do you remember what the Lord Jesus Christ said to His disciples, when He was having that last loving talk with them just before wicked Judas brought His enemies into the Garden of Gethsemane to take Him ? He said,—

'You are my friends if you do whatsoever I command you.'

So God will call even little children His friends, if they believe in Jesus and love and obey Him, and try to be gentle and good as He was.

CHAPTER IX.

HAGAR, SARAH'S MAID.

EIGHT years had passed since God had called Abram away from his own people, and had made him all those gracious promises. You remember what those promises were? God said that He would make of him a great nation, and that He would give all the land of Canaan to him and to his children.

But now Abram was living in tents in the plains of Mamre, and he could not call one yard of the country his own ; and more than that, both he and Sarah his wife were getting very old, and they had not even one little child.

I dare say Abram often wondered when it would please God to give him all the blessings He had promised. But God had not forgotten him ; and one night He came and spoke to him in a vision. I do not know what it was that Abram saw ; perhaps it was only a bright and shining light—just the visible sign of God's presence and glory. I think he must have felt afraid when he saw it, for God said, ' Fear not, Abram ; I will take care of you, and will give you great things.'

And Abram answered, 'Lord God, what wilt Thou give me? for I have no child, and when I am dead all my riches will go to one of my servants.'

Then the Lord spoke again to Abram, and said, 'It is not to a *servant*, but to a *son* that you will leave your riches.'

And God made Abram get up, and go out of his tent. It was dark, and thousands and thousands of stars—more than could be counted—were shining in the midnight sky. Then God said, 'Look now toward heaven, and see if you can tell the number of the stars! so also your grandchildren, and their children's children, shall be more than can be counted.'

And Abram believed God. He was sure that God was true, and that He would do everything He had promised in His own good time. And because he believed, he waited patiently.

But Sarah was not patient. She had waited a long time for God to fulfil His promise, and now *ten* years had passed away since they had come down into Canaan, and she was beginning to be in despair, for she thought that she was getting too old ever to have a baby of her own. So I will tell you what she did.

Sarah had a servant whose name was Hagar, and she was a slave. Those who are slaves belong altogether to their master or mistress; they may never go away from them, even if they are cruelly treated and are very unhappy. And not only that,

but everything that the slaves have belongs to the master or mistress—even their children. So Sarah thought that if she were to give her slave to Abram to be his wife, then, if Hagar should have any children, they would belong to *her*.

She spoke to her husband about it, and told him her plan; and Abram agreed to do as she wished, and to take Hagar to be his wife.

In those days it was a common thing for a man to have more than one wife; but in the beginning it was not so. God only created one woman for Adam—He only intended each man to have one wife, and it was the family of wicked Cain who first began to transgress God's laws.

Abram was the first *good* man of whom we read in the Bible who had two wives. Before he took Hagar to be his wife, he ought to have asked God what was *His* will in the matter; but he and Sarah went their own way about it, and it brought them into a great deal of trouble and difficulty.

When Hagar knew that she would have a baby of her own, she began to be proud, and to behave badly to her mistress, and to be rude to her. Then Sarah complained about it to Abram; and he said, 'Behold, your servant is in your own power; do to her as you think right.'

So Sarah punished Hagar for her rudeness; but Hagar was too proud to bear it patiently, and she ran away. Was it wrong of her to go away like this? Yes, it was very wrong. She was Abram's wife, and she had no right to leave him; she

was Sarah's slave, and her place was by her mistress.

She had gone a long way from home, and was sitting down to rest in a lonely wilderness, near to a well of water. She must have been feeling very sad and miserable, sitting there all by herself, and perhaps she was thinking how foolish she was to have left a comfortable home because she had been punished for a fault. All at once she heard her name called. An angel appeared to her—not a created angel, but the Angel of the Covenant, even the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

He said, 'Hagar, Sarah's maid, where do you come from? and where are you going?'

She answered, 'I flee from the face of my mistress Sarah.'

And the Lord said unto her, 'Return to your mistress, and be humble and submissive.'

Then the Lord spoke very kindly to her. He said, 'When your baby is born, you shall call his name Ishmael' (that means, 'God will hear'), 'because the Lord has heard your sorrow.'

There must have been great comfort to poor Hagar in the name by which God had told her to call her baby-boy. The word Ishmael, 'God will hear,' was a promise that God *would* hear, as He had already heard, in every time of need. And Hagar called the name of the Lord who spoke with her, 'Thou God seest me;' and she called the well by which she was sitting, 'The well of Him who liveth, and who seeth me.'



So Hagar got up and returned, and went back to Sarah's tent, and behaved herself humbly to her mistress, as God had told her to do. She must have told her wonderful story about the Lord having appeared to her, and what He said to her; for when her little son was born, Abram called his name Ishmael.

I dare say both he and Sarah rejoiced very much at this baby's birth, and thought that this was the beginning of God's promise to them. But they were mistaken. *This* was not the child He had promised. Abram's faith and patience were to be tried for a great many years yet.

CHAPTER X.

GOD'S PROMISE AND ABRAHAM'S PRAYER.

WE do not read of God appearing to Abram again for a long time, not till Ishmael had grown to be a great boy of thirteen years of age. Then, once more, God came to speak to the man He deigned to call His friend, and He said to him, 'I am the Almighty God; walk before Me and be upright, and I will make My covenant—or agreement—between Me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.'

And Abram fell on his face; and God talked with him, saying, 'Your name shall not be called Abram any more, but Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made you. And I will be a God to you and to your children for ever.' The word Abraham means, 'Father of a great multitude;' so this new name would always remind him of God's promise. God went on speaking to him very graciously. He said, 'As for Sarah your wife I will bless her, and she shall have a son; yea, I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations.'

Then Abraham fell upon his face and laughed,

God's Promise and Abraham's Prayer. 63

for his heart was full of joy and gladness. He did not for a moment think that it was too good news to be true, for he was quite certain that what God had promised, He was able also to do. He was 'strong in faith, giving glory to God.' But Abraham wanted God to bless Ishmael also, for he loved his boy very dearly, and he said, 'Oh that Ishmael might live before Thee!'

God answered, 'Sarah, your wife, shall have a son indeed, and you shall call his name Isaac' (which means, 'Laughter'). 'And as for Ishmael, I have heard you. Behold! I have blessed him, and I will make him a great nation. But my covenant will I establish with Isaac, who shall be born next year.' And God left off talking to Abraham, and went back to heaven.

One very hot day, soon after this, Abraham was sitting at his tent-door. It was just the hottest time of the day, and he was resting in the shade (for his tent was under a tree), when he saw three men coming towards him. They *looked* like men, but one of them was Jesus, the Lord Jehovah, and the other two were angels. Abraham, however, thought they were travellers, and he ran from the tent-door to meet them, and bowed himself toward the ground, and said,—

'My Lord, I pray you do not go away just yet, but come and rest yourselves under the tree, and let some water be fetched to wash your feet, and I will bring you some bread; and when you have eaten and rested, then you may go on your journey again.'

The men replied, 'So do as you have said.'

In those hot countries where people wear sandals instead of boots or shoes, the feet become very uncomfortable after walking; and it is most refreshing to take off the sandals and to wash the hot and dusty feet. So, you see, Abraham thought of everything necessary for the comfort of his guests.

Then he hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, 'Take some fine flour, and bake some cakes as quickly as you can.' And he ran to where his cattle were resting, or grazing, and chose from among them a calf which was tender and good, and gave it to one of his servants to kill, and to roast it. And when all was ready, Abraham took the roast meat and the cakes, and butter and milk, and set them before the three men under the tree; and while they ate, he stood by them and waited on them.

And they said to him, 'Where is Sarah your wife?'

He answered, 'Behold, in the tent.'

Then one of them said, 'I will certainly do as I have said, and Sarah, your wife, shall have a son.'

Ah! these words showed Abraham that this gracious guest was the Lord Himself.

Now Sarah was close by, just inside the tent-door; and she heard what had been said. But she did not believe it; she thought it was too good news to be true. So she laughed within herself as she thought, 'Is it likely that I shall ever have a baby, now I am so old?' Hers was not a laugh of joy and gladness, but of unbelief.

God's Promise and Abraham's Prayer. 65

The Lord knew everything that was in her heart, and He said to Abraham, 'Why did Sarah laugh? Is anything too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed she shall surely have a son.'

Sarah was frightened when she found that her thoughts were known, and she tried to hide her fault by saying what was not true. She said, 'I did not laugh.'

But the Lord answered, 'Nay; but you did laugh.'

Sarah believed after that, that God, who could read her heart, could indeed give her the little son He had promised.

And the men rose up to go away, and they went towards Sodom; and Abraham went with them part of the way. Then the Lord said, 'Shall I hide from Abraham the thing which I do? For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do that which is right in my sight.' And the Lord said, 'Because the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are very wicked, and because their sin is grievous, I will go down now and see whether they have done altogether as I have heard; and if not, I will know.'

And the two angels went toward Sodom, but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

And Abraham drew near and said, 'Wilt Thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? Perhaps there are fifty good people in the city; wilt Thou not spare the place for the sake of the fifty

righteous that are there? That be far from Thee to slay the righteous with the wicked; shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?’

And the Lord said, ‘If I find in Sodom fifty righteous, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.’

And Abraham answered and said, ‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Perhaps there shall be five less than the fifty righteous; wilt Thou destroy all the city for lack of five?’

And He said, ‘If I find there forty-and-five, I will not destroy it.’

And Abraham spoke yet again to the Lord, and said, ‘Perhaps only forty shall be found there.’

And the Lord said, ‘I will not do it for forty’s sake.’

And Abraham said, ‘Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Perhaps there shall thirty be found there.’

And He said, ‘I will not do it if I find thirty there.’

Again Abraham pleaded with God, and said, ‘Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord. Perhaps there shall be twenty righteous in the city.’

And the Lord said, ‘I will not destroy it for twenty’s sake.’

Then Abraham said, ‘Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once. Perhaps ten shall be found there.’

God's Promise and Abraham's Prayer. 67

And He said, 'I will not destroy it for ten's sake.'

And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left talking with Abraham; and Abraham returned to his tent.

How earnestly Abraham prayed! and how graciously the Lord listened to his prayer! Do you think that *you* would like to pray to Him, too, if you could hear His tender, gracious voice answering you? Dear children, remember that though you cannot see Him or hear Him, as Abraham could, yet He is near you, and just as ready to listen to *you*, as to him. The Lord Jehovah, as He is called in the Old Testament, is the Lord Jesus of the New Testament; and He never yet cast out any who came to Him—and *He never will*. He is just the same, yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

So when you pray to Him, and tell Him all that is in your heart, and all that you want Him to do for you, be *quite sure* that He is listening to every word; for the Bible tells us He is much more ready to hear than we are to pray.

CHAPTER XI.

LOT LOSES ALL HIS RICHES.

YOU remember that when Lot had chosen the beautiful plain country of Jordan for his flocks to pasture in, he himself had gone to live in the City of Sodom. I told you that the people were dreadfully wicked, and that every day Lot was vexed at their sinful ways ; yet he went on living there still. Perhaps it was for his sake that Abraham had pleaded so earnestly with God to save that wicked city ; for Abraham loved his nephew.

God had promised that if only ten good people could be found in Sodom, He would spare all the place for their sakes. So if all Lot's family had been righteous and God-fearing, that crowded town would never have been destroyed. But, as we shall see, it was only Lot himself who continued to love and serve God faithfully ; all his family fell more or less into bad ways, from having been with bad companions. Oh, how foolish and how wrong it was of Lot to live in the midst of a people who were provoking God every day !

On the evening of the same day that Abraham had been praying for the people, two angels came

to Sodom. They were the same who had been sitting under the tree that morning near Abraham's tent, and for whom he had killed the fatted calf; but the Lord Jehovah was not with them now.

Lot was sitting in the gate of the city, in the cool of the evening; and when he saw the angels he thought they were travellers. He rose up to meet them (just as Abraham had done in the morning), and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground. And he said,—

‘Behold now, my lords, come in, I pray you, into my house, and stay all night, and wash your feet; and to-morrow morning you shall rise up early and go on your way again.’

And they answered, ‘No; but we will remain in the street all night.’

Lot was distressed that they would not go to his house, and he begged them so earnestly to do so, that at last they consented. They went into his house, and he made them a feast, and they did eat. But before they all lay down to rest that night the angels told Lot why they were there. They said, ‘We are going to destroy this place, for the people are so wicked; and God has seen all that they have done, and He has sent us to destroy them. Have you in this city any one belonging to you, besides your wife and your two daughters who are now in the house? Your married daughters with their husbands, and your sons—bring them all out of this place, or they will be destroyed too.’

Then Lot went out into the streets, to the

houses where his sons-in-law were living ; and he said to them, 'Up, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy this city.'

But his sons-in-law did not believe it, and they laughed at Lot. *They* did not fear God or care for Him ; and they were not at all troubled at the message their father-in-law had brought them. Oh, how Lot must have repented now, that he had ever gone to live in Sodom ! His sons and his married daughters had become careless and godless like the people of the city. They had chosen wicked companions, and they had learned their ways.

As soon as it was morning, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, 'Arise, take your wife and your two daughters which are here, and go, or else you will be destroyed in the punishment of the city.'

But Lot did not make haste—he lingered. Perhaps it was the thought of his other children that made him unwilling to go away and leave them to certain death, or perhaps he was sorry to leave his comfortable home. But whatever was the reason of his wishing to delay, there was no time now to be lost. So the angels laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters (because the Lord was very merciful to him), and they led them out of the city.

When they had led them a little way beyond the gates of the city, the angels said, 'Escape for your life ! Do not look behind you, and do not

stay in the plain ; escape to the mountain, or you will die.'

And Lot said to them, 'Oh, not so, my Lord. Behold now, Thou hast been very gracious to me, and hast shown me great mercy in saving my life ; but I cannot escape to the mountain ; it is so far off that some evil is sure to happen to me, and I shall die. Behold now, here is a very small city, and it is quite near ; oh ! let me escape there (it is such a little town !), and I shall live.'

And the angel said unto him, 'See, I have answered your prayer about this thing also ; and I will not destroy this city for which you have spoken. Be quick and escape to it, for I cannot do anything until you are there.'

What a solemn journey that was in the early morning ! It was still dark, for the sun had not yet risen. The city that was so steeped in wickedness, and that was so soon to be destroyed, was quite quiet now, for the people were sleeping—while Lot with his wife and two daughters were flying for their lives across the plain. Lot could not save any of his flocks and herds ; he could not carry away his silver and gold, and treasures of other kinds ; many who were near and dear to him—daughters, and sons, and sons-in-law—had to be left behind. All his riches were gone at once, and only his wife and two of his daughters were with him in that hurried flight.

But Lot's troubles were not over yet. You remember that the angels had told them that they

were not to look behind them—they were to go straight on without looking back. But Lot's wife *did* look back. Either she did not believe what the angels had said, or else her heart was in Sodom, and she was longing to return. Whatever the reason was, she disobeyed the command of the angels, and in looking back she lost her life.

Poor Lot ! he dared not look round to see what had become of her ; he dared not turn back even for a moment ; he had to hurry on, leaving her dead body on the plain. Oh, what bitter sorrow had come to him, through his having chosen that wicked city for his dwelling-place !

The sun had just risen, and it was the full, clear morning when Lot and his two daughters came to Zoar, which was the name of the small town that the angels had said should be spared for his sake ; and as soon as he was in safety there, the Lord rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah fire and brimstone out of heaven—such a storm of fire as had never been seen before—and the cities were thrown down, and all the people that were in them were killed ; and the flocks and the herds that were in the plain, and all the trees, and all the things that grew upon the ground, were completely destroyed.

Abraham was very anxious to know what would be the fate of those two cities ; he was longing to know if God had found there ten people who served Him. So he got up early in the morning, and went to the place where he had stood before the Lord. Then he looked toward Sodom and Go-

morrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and all he saw was a dense black smoke rising up over all that country. He knew then that God's punishment had fallen on those wicked cities, and that the ten righteous had not been found there.

We hear very little more about poor Lot. He did not stay long in Zoar, for he had had such a terrible lesson on the danger of living in the midst of wicked people, that he was afraid to remain there. Zoar, though a little town, was a wicked one; so Lot took his two daughters with him and went up to the mountain. No houses were there, and no people; but he and his daughters lived a lonely life in a cave—that is, a large hollow place almost like a room—in the mountain.

We do not know whether he ever went away from his mountain-home, or whether he died there. We only know that he had the love of God in his heart, and that when he died his spirit went to God.

CHAPTER XII.

THE HEIR AND THE OUTCAST.

AT last the longed-for time had come when God gave to Abraham and Sarah the little child He had promised to them. Just at the exact time He had said, and when Abraham was a hundred years old, the little baby-boy was born; and the happy parents called his name Isaac, as they had been commanded. It was a time of great rejoicing to them both; and Sarah said, 'God has made me to laugh; and all who hear of it will laugh, too. For who would have thought of saying to Abraham that Sarah should have a son?'

The child was rightly named Isaac, or 'Laughter,' for Abraham laughed with joy when God told him he should be born, and Sarah laughed when she heard the promise given (and I am sure she must always have remembered that with shame and sorrow), because she did not believe; but now again she laughed, with thankfulness and delight, because the promise had come true.

When Isaac was three or four years old, Abraham made a great feast, to which he invited all his friends and neighbours. He wanted them

to see his little son, who was now no longer a baby ; and he showed Isaac to them, and told them that it was to *him*, and not to Ishmael, that he would leave all his riches. So they knew that Isaac was his father's heir, as God had said he should be.

It is supposed that at this time Abraham gave his little son a striped robe, or tunic, of different colours, as a token (or sign) of his being the heir. He would have explained to Ishmael that it was God's will that it should be so ; and that though he was the eldest son, yet it was Isaac who was to have the special blessing.

But Ishmael was not content with God's will. He felt jealous of his little brother, and angry with him ; and Sarah saw him treating her little son unkindly one day, and mocking him. This made her afraid that Ishmael might do him some harm, and so she said to Abraham,—

‘Send away this servant and her son ; for the son of this slave shall not be heir with my son, even with Isaac.’

But Abraham did not wish to send them away. He loved Ishmael, who was now a big lad of seventeen years of age ; and the thought of doing what Sarah had begged him to do filled him with pain. I do not know if he asked God what he should do about it, but I think he must have done so ; for those who love God and trust in Him, and walk in His ways, always tell Him all that is in their hearts, and ask Him for help in all their difficulties and sorrows.

God knew how very sad it made Abraham to think of parting with his son, and so He said, 'Do not let it be grievous to you because of the lad, and because of his mother: in all that Sarah has said to you hearken unto her voice; for all the great blessings I have promised you will come to you through Isaac and his children. And Ishmael also will I bless, because he is your son.'

As soon as Abraham knew that it was God's will that Hagar and her boy should be sent away, he did not hesitate a moment longer. He rose up early in the morning, and took some bread and a bottle of water, and gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder; then he sent her away, and Ishmael also.

It was a sorrowful parting. Hagar was now turned out of a home where she had lived for a great many years; and her boy, who she hoped would one day be his father's heir, was turned out too. If they had behaved well, this would never have happened; but both Hagar and her boy had proud and passionate tempers, and this was the cause of all the trouble that came upon them.

Abraham, though he was so obedient to God's word, must have had many sad thoughts that early morning as he watched them turning away from his tent door. He would grieve that his son's misconduct had brought this distress upon him and his mother; yet he would feel comfort in remembering God's promise, that He would bless the lad for his sake.

Hagar was intending to return to Egypt, which was her home before she became Sarah's servant. But she lost her way, and wandered about in the wilderness, not knowing in which direction to go. It was very hot, and the water in the bottle was soon gone. They looked about for some well, or running stream, but they could not find any; and at last Ishmael became so weary and tired, and faint from thirst, that his mother feared he was at the point of death.

She took him up in her arms, and carried him to a shrub or small tree that was growing near, and laid him gently down in the shade. Then she went away from him a little distance, for she could not bear to see him die. She said, 'Let me not see the death of the child.' And she sat down, and lifted up her voice and wept.

She was so miserable and unhappy; but she did not pray to God to help her; and she seemed quite to forget how He had spoken to her and comforted her many years before, in another wilderness, when she was lonely and sad. She seemed quite to forget, also, the meaning of her boy's name, and the promise there was in it, 'God will hear.'

But Ishmael cried to God, and God heard him. Abraham had taught his son to worship God and to pray to Him, and now in his great need he remembered his father's teaching.

And the Angel of the Covenant, Jesus, who had spoken to Hagar before, called to her again out of heaven and said unto her, 'What is the

matter with you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the lad where he is. Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in your arms ; for I will make him a great nation.'

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. This was a most joyful sight. She ran to the well and filled her bottle with cool, delicious water, and gave it to her boy ; and he drank and felt refreshed and strong again.

Did Hagar thank God? Did she love Him for all His tender care of herself and Ishmael? I do not know. The Bible tells us nothing more about her, except that some years afterwards she took a wife for her son out of the land of Egypt.

And God was with Ishmael. He never forgets His promises, and so He never forgot that He had told Abraham He would bless the lad for his father's sake. And Ishmael grew, and dwelt in the wilderness of Paran, and became an archer. An archer is one who is skilful, or clever, in the use of a bow and arrows. He was a wild man. His hand was against every man, and every man's hand was against him ; which means, that he did not live peaceably with his neighbours. But God prospered him, and gave him twelve sons, who were all princes and great men ; and in after years the family of Ishmael became a great and powerful nation, as God had promised.

CHAPTER XIII.

ABRAHAM'S OBEDIENCE.

THE years passed very quietly and peacefully in Abraham's home. Isaac was growing up to be the delight and joy of his father and mother ; and his father was training him carefully in the way of holiness, and teaching him how to serve and honour God. It was a happy little family ; father, mother, and son all loving God, and loving each other dearly.

But when Isaac had grown up to be a young man, twenty-two years of age, God wanted to try Abraham—to see if his faith and his obedience were as strong as when he had left his own country, and all his relations, to wander in a strange land at God's command. Abraham loved his boy with all his heart ; did he love his God as much ? did he love Him well enough to give up his son to Him ? God wished to prove his *love*, as well as his obedience ; so he called to him out of heaven and said,—

‘ Abraham ! ’

And Abraham replied, ‘ Behold, here am I.’

Then God said, ‘ Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go into the land of

Moriah; and offer him there as a sacrifice upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of.

What terrible words these were for a loving father to hear! Must he indeed take his beloved child—the son of his old age—and kill him on an altar as if he were a lamb? *Could* he do it?

It was indeed a very hard thing for him to do ; but he never thought of disobeying. As soon as he knew God's will, that moment he set about doing it. He did not ask God to spare his son ; he did not even ask *why* God wished him to offer up his darling boy instead of a lamb ; he just began immediately to do as he was told, without a murmur, and without a word.

This was true obedience. And this is the way you, dear children, should always obey your parents. There should never be the question, 'Why must I do it?' There should never be grumbling, or unwillingness ; but every order should be quickly and cheerfully obeyed, in little things as well as in great things ; for remember, 'this is well pleasing unto the Lord.'

Abraham had so often heard God's voice in tender, loving words, and gracious promises, that he felt he could not distrust Him now, because he was told to do something painful and difficult. He got up very early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son. Then they cut up some wood for the burnt offering, and when all was ready they started on their journey ; for they had a long way

to go, and it would take them three days before they could get to the land of Moriah.

Abraham's thoughts were not *all* painful ones during that three days' journey. He remembered God's repeated promises that great blessings should come to him through Isaac, and he knew that God would keep His word. So, even if he had to kill his son, in obedience to God's command, he knew that God could raise him up again from the dead.

They journeyed on, without stopping on the road, except when it was necessary to rest, and on the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place a long way off to which God had told him to go. Then he said to his young men, 'You stay here with the ass, while I and the lad go up yonder mountain to worship God. We will come to you again.'

And Abraham took the wood which was to be burnt on the altar, and gave it to Isaac to carry, while he himself took the fire for lighting the wood, and a knife to kill the sacrifice. And they went both of them together. But all this time Abraham never told his son what he was going to do.

At last Isaac spoke to his father, and said, 'My father!'

And Abraham said, 'Here am I, my son.'

And Isaac said, 'Behold! here is the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?'

Abraham answered, 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb for a burnt offering.'

He would not explain to Isaac before it was necessary that *he* was the lamb that was to be offered up. He did not wish his son to be troubled at the thought of it, before the time came to lay him on the altar.

So they went both of them together till they came to the place which God had told him of. It was the top of a mountain; and there Abraham built an altar with stones. Then he laid the wood upon it, in proper order. And now the time had come when he must tell his dear son Isaac that *he* was the lamb that was to be offered as a sacrifice upon the altar. With what wonder and surprise he must have listened to his father's words! Do you think he complained, or ran away, or tried in any way to escape?

Oh, no; he had learned to obey his father in all things; and he had also learned to obey and trust God. As meekly as a lamb he allowed his father to bind him with a rope; and when that was done, Abraham laid him down upon the altar. Then he took the knife and stretched out his hand to slay his son. But that instant, while his hand was still uplifted, and before he had time to strike, the angel of the Lord called to him out of heaven, and said, 'Abraham! Abraham!'

And Abraham answered, 'Here am I.'

And the angel said, 'Lay not your hand upon the lad, neither do anything to him; for now I

know that you fear God, because you have not withheld (or, kept back) your son, your only son, from Me.'

What a heavy load must have been lifted from Abraham's heart by these words! for though he was so sure that God would have given him back again, the thought of putting his loving and obedient boy to death, and of putting him to so much pain, was a bitter trial to him. But now, how joyfully and thankfully he threw down the knife, and untied the rope that bound him! It was almost as if he had received him alive again from the dead, for Isaac had been very near death.

Just then Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold! behind him there was a ram caught in the bushes by its horns; so Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up for a burnt offering instead of his son. And Abraham gave that place a new name; he called it Jehovah-jireh, which means, 'The Lord will provide.'

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven the second time, saying, 'I have sworn by Myself, saith the Lord, for because you have done this thing, and have not kept back your son, your only son, I will bless you, and multiply you exceedingly, even as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore. And a great blessing shall come to all the nations of the world through one of your family.'

Of whom was the angel speaking? Who was it of all Abraham's children's children who was,

many hundreds of years afterwards, to be a blessing to all the world? It was the Lord Jesus. Of Him only could such words be spoken; for He is the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

After this Abraham and Isaac returned to the two young men who were waiting, with the ass, at the bottom of the mountain. Then they all went home together, with hearts full of thankfulness and praise. And how joyfully Sarah must have welcomed them back again! I do not know whether Abraham had told her, when he left home, what God had commanded him to do; but I think he felt so sure that their darling would be restored to them again, that he would not grieve her by telling her beforehand of his sad, strange errand.

I wonder if this story reminds you of *another* Father who gave an only Son to be offered up as a sacrifice? God, our heavenly Father, so loved the world (though it was such a sinful and ungrateful world) that He gave His only begotten Son to die for it. And Jesus was content to do it, for His delight was to do His Father's will.

Very near to the spot where Abraham bound his boy, and took a knife to slay him, Jesus offered up His precious life upon the painful cross.

Was not the place rightly named Jehovah-jireh? for there God provided the one perfect sin-offering. He gave His own dear Son to die there, that all who believe in Him should not perish, but should have everlasting life.

CHAPTER XIV.

ABRAHAM'S SORROW.

TWELVE more happy, peaceful years, passed away, and then a great sorrow came upon Abraham. His dear wife Sarah died. She was very old, having lived a hundred and twenty-seven years ; and Abraham mourned for Sarah and wept for her, for she had been his loving companion for a long, long time.

I told you that though Abraham had lived for a great number of years in the land of Canaan, and though God had promised that one day all that country should belong to his children, yet there was not even one little spot of it at present that he could call his own. And now he wanted to bury Sarah ; but he had not one tiny piece of ground belonging to him.

So he determined to buy some land ; but he would only buy a place for burial. He believed that God would give all the land of Canaan to his children, as He had said, and that was why he would not *buy* what was going to be so freely *given*. Only, he must have a little spot of ground where he could bury his precious dead. He went,

therefore, to the people of the land, and stood up before them and said,—

‘I am a stranger with you, and am only staying here for a time ; let me have a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.’

And the people of the land answered Abraham saying, ‘Hear us, my lord. You are a mighty prince—a great chief—amongst us ; choose now whichever of our sepulchres—or graves—you like the best ; for none of us will refuse to give you what you ask for, so that you may bury your dead.’

Then Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land for their kind words. And he talked with them and said, ‘If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight, hear me, and entreat Ephron that he may give me the Cave of Machpelah which belongs to him, and which is at the end of his field. I will give him as much money for it as it is worth, so that I may have a burying-place amongst you.’

When Ephron heard that Abraham wanted his field, he said at once, ‘Nay, my lord, I will *give* you both the field and the cave that is in it. In the presence of the sons of my people I give it to you ; bury your dead.’

But Abraham would not receive the field as a gift. God had given him great riches, he had plenty of silver and gold, and he determined to buy it, that it might belong to him altogether and completely, and to his children after him. For he

knew that his children, and his children's children would be living in that land in future years, and he wished his tomb to be amongst them. But he felt very grateful to Ephron for wishing to make him a present of the field and the cave, and he bowed down himself again before the people of the land, as he said to Ephron,—

‘I pray you hear me. I will give you money for the field ; take it from me, and I will bury my dead there.’

So Ephron sold the field and the Cave of Machpelah to Abraham for four hundred pieces of silver ; and then the cave and the field, and all the trees that were in it, were given over to Abraham to belong to him and to his family for ever.

And after this, Abraham buried his dear wife there. It was a bitter sorrow to him to think that he would see her loved face no more on earth. But as he laid her dead body tenderly down in its last resting-place, he knew that her spirit had gone to God ; and I am quite sure he looked forward with a thankful hope to seeing her again in heaven, when he would never be parted from her any more.

Abraham was now an old man, and of a great age ; and he began to be anxious that his son Isaac should have just such a loving wife and companion as Sarah had been to him. He had a man-servant who had lived with him for a very long time, who had charge of all his riches, who managed everything in his house, and who was trusted like a

friend ; so Abraham called this servant one day, and spoke to him about Isaac. He said,—

‘I want you to make me a promise that you will not take a wife for my son of any of the Canaanites among whom I dwell. But you shall go back to my country, and to my relations, and bring a wife for my son Isaac.’

And the servant said to his master, ‘Perhaps the woman will not be willing to follow me to this land ; must I then take your son into your own country from whence you came out, that he may fetch her himself?’

Abraham answered, ‘You shall not do this : take care that you never take my son back there. The Lord God of heaven who took me from my father’s house, and from the land of my relations, and who spake unto me and promised that He would give all this land unto my children, *He* will send His angel before you ; and you shall take a wife for my son from my own people. But if the woman will not be willing to follow you, then it will not be your fault that you cannot keep your promise ; only, be sure that you never take my son back there.’

Then the servant made his master a faithful promise that he would do everything just as he wished.

I wonder if you can tell me why Abraham was so anxious that Isaac’s wife should not be a woman of Canaan ? You remember the Canaanites were idolaters, and a very wicked people.

They were of the family of Ham, who was Noah's wicked son; and God had cursed Ham, and had said that his family should not prosper. So Abraham could not let his son—to whom such great promises were given—take for his companion one from a people that God had cursed. Abraham himself was of the family of Shem; and his son's wife must be of that family too.

Do you remember who Shem was? He was one of Noah's *good* sons. And at this very time, when Abraham was sending away his servant to find a wife for Isaac, Shem was still alive. He was a very, very old man—five hundred and eighty-nine years of age. Yet he did not die till eleven more years had passed away.

I dare say Abraham had often seen him, before God called him away from his own land, and had talked with him. And how earnestly he would have listened to the aged Patriarch's account of the wickedness of the world before the flood, of God's anger and sorrow, of the building of the ark, of their strange life in it, and of that awful flood which destroyed every living soul except his father Noah and his wife, and his two brothers and himself and their wives.

CHAPTER XV.

THE FAITHFUL SERVANT.

ELIEZER—for that was the name of Abraham's servant—felt that he had a very important work before him. His master had put a great deal of trust in him, and he was anxious to do his very best to show that he was worthy of this trust and confidence.

He began immediately to make preparation for his departure. But first of all he bought several ornaments of gold, and vessels (or, cups) of silver, and handsome clothing, such as shawls and other articles of dress, and many other valuable things. Then he took ten of his master's camels, and some men to take care of them (for Abraham gave him power to do exactly as he wished with his servants, as well as with his goods, knowing he was to be trusted), and after that he began his journey.

Eliezer knew that his master had a brother living far off in a city called Haran, and there it was he intended to go. He had a long way to travel ; but he made no delay, and at last he came to the city where Nahor, Abraham's brother, lived.

It was drawing towards evening ; and Eliezer

thought he would wait at a well which was near the town till the women should come out to draw water ; for in that country, in the cool of the evening, and in the early morning, all the women go to the wells to draw water, and to carry it to their homes. It is often very hard work, for sometimes the well is far from their homes, and sometimes they have to make several journeys backwards and forwards ; and sometimes the women have to draw water for flocks of cattle and sheep, as well as to carry home what may be required for washing, cooking, and drinking.

So Eliezer waited quietly at the well ; and he made his camels kneel down to rest—for these animals do not *lie* down when they are resting, as horses do. But the faithful servant's mind was very full of the promise he had made his master ; and as he was exceedingly anxious to do his work well, he prayed to God to help him. This was his prayer:—

‘O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee send me good speed’ (that means, prosper me) ‘this day, and show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold ! I stand here by the well of water, and presently the daughters of the men of the city will come out to draw water ; let it be that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down your pitcher, I pray you, that I may drink ; if she shall say, Drink, and I will give your camels drink also,—let her be the one that Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac. And by that I shall know that Thou hast shown kindness unto my master.’

You see, the servant did not make at all a grand prayer. He just spoke to God, and told Him exactly what he wanted, in simple, earnest words, asking God's help and guidance.

And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold ! Rebekah came out of the city, carrying a pitcher upon her shoulder. She was the granddaughter of Abraham's brother, and she was very beautiful ; but, of course, Eliezer did not know who she was. So Rebekah came to the well, and went down a few steps to fill her pitcher, and came up again. And the servant ran to meet her, and said,—

'Let me, I pray you, drink a little water out of your pitcher.'

Very courteously and kindly she answered, 'Drink, my lord.'

And she hastened and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink. And when he had finished drinking, she said,—

'I will draw water for your camels also, until they have had enough.'

And she made haste and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again to the well to draw water ; and she drew for all his camels. Was not this a gracious answer to the servant's prayer ?

Eliezer kept looking at her in astonishment as she was so kindly drawing water for his camels ; but he did not say anything yet—he was wondering if God had made his way prosperous or not. But as soon as the camels had done drinking, he took a

large ring of gold and gave it to Rebekah. It was called a 'nose-ring;' for in that country it is the custom for women to wear a ring in the nose, as an ornament. He also gave her two bracelets, heavy with gold, to wear on her arms; and then he said,—

'Whose daughter are you? Tell me, I pray you, is there room in your father's house for us to lodge in?'

And she said to him, 'I am the daughter of Bethuel—Nahor's granddaughter. We have plenty of food for your camels, and room for you and your servants to lodge in.'

And the man bowed down his head and worshipped the Lord. He saw how graciously God had answered his prayer, and he said, 'Blessed be the Lord God of my master Abraham. I being in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brother.'

And Rebekah ran back to the house, and told her mother and her brother Laban all that had happened. And when Laban saw the golden ornaments that were on his sister—the beautiful nose-ring, and the bracelets—and when he had heard from Rebekah all the words that the man had said to her, then he ran out, and came to the man, and found him standing by the camels at the well. And Laban said to him,—

'Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; why do you stand outside? for I have prepared the house, and arranged a place for the camels.'

Then Eliezer went to Laban's house. And the

harness and saddles were taken off the camels, and food was given to them. And water was brought to wash the servant's feet, and the feet of the men who were with him. After that, a meal was prepared for Eliezer and the men ; but he said,—

‘I will not eat, until I have told my business!’

And Laban said, ‘Speak on.’

Then Eliezer said, ‘I am Abraham's servant. And the Lord has blessed my master greatly, and he has become great. He has flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and men-servants and maid-servants, and camels and asses. And Sarah, my master's wife, had a son when she was old ; and everything that my master has, has been given to this son. And my master made me promise not to take a woman of Canaan to be his son's wife ; but he told me to go to his own relations, and to bring back a wife for his son.’

Then the servant went on to tell Rebekah's father and brother how he had come to the well that day, and how he had prayed to God to help him. He told them exactly the words he had said in his prayer, and how he had asked God to show him very plainly which was the woman who should be Isaac's wife. He still went on with his story, and said,—

‘Before I had done speaking in my heart, behold Rebekah came with her pitcher on her shoulder, and she went down to the well and drew water ; and I said to her, Let me drink, I pray you. And she made haste and let down her

pitcher from her shoulder, and said, Drink, and I will give your camels drink also. And I asked her who she was; and when she told me, I put the ring upon her face, and the bracelets on her arms. And I bowed down my head and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham.'

So when he had told them the whole story, he said, 'And now if you will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me; and if not, tell me; that I may know what to do.'

Then Rebekah's father and her brother Laban answered Eliezer, and said, 'This is the Lord's doing; we cannot speak unto you good or bad. Take Rebekah, and go; and let her be the wife of your master's son, as the Lord has spoken.'

And it came to pass that when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, bowing himself to the earth. And he brought out the jewels of silver, and the jewels of gold, and beautiful garments which he had bought in Canaan, and gave them to Rebekah. He gave also precious things to her mother, and to her brother.

After this they did eat and drink, he and the men that were with him; and they stayed in Laban's house all that night. But next morning, when they got up, Eliezer said,—

'Send me away to my master.'

And her mother and brother said, 'Let Rebekah remain with us a few days longer; after that she shall go.'

But the servant said, 'Hinder me not, seeing the Lord has prospered my way. Send me away, that I may go to my master.'

And they said, 'We will call the damsel, and ask her what she wishes to do.'

So they called Rebekah, and asked her, 'Will you go with this man!'

And she said, 'I will go.'

Then they blessed Rebekah, and sent her away, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men. And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels and followed the man; and the servant took Rebekah and went towards home again.

Now Isaac had gone out into the field towards evening to think about God and to pray. He had walked to the well where the Angel Jehovah had spoken to Hagar before Ishmael was born, and which she had called, 'The well of Him who seeth me.' He was thinking of all God's goodness, and praying for His blessing, when he looked up and saw, and behold the camels were coming.

And Rebekah looked up at the same time, and she said to the servant, 'What man is this who is walking in the field to meet us?'

And the servant said, 'It is my master Isaac.'

Then Rebekah took a veil and covered herself, so that her face could not be seen (for in that country women always covered their faces when they were in the presence of strangers), and she

got down off the camel. And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.

And Isaac brought Rebekah into his mother Sarah's tent, and she became his wife ; and he loved her very much.

And Isaac was comforted after his mother's death ; for though Sarah had died about three years before, yet Isaac had mourned for her all this time. And I am quite sure Abraham must have thanked God with all his heart, when he heard his faithful servant's story, and found how graciously God had guided him to find a fit and loving companion for the son for whom such glorious promises were given.

CHAPTER XVI.

A BIRTHRIGHT SOLD.

AFTER these things, Abraham took another wife when he was very old, and her name was Keturah. We do not read anything about her in the Bible, except that she had several sons ; but Abraham gave all he had to Isaac, for he was the heir and the child of promise.

But he gave gifts (most likely presents of money and cattle) to the sons of Keturah, and sent them away to another country—just as he had sent away Ishmael—that they might not be in Isaac's way, or interfere with his inheritance. Abraham gave gifts also to Ishmael.

All this time Isaac and Rebekah were living very happily together, near Abraham's tents. But they had one great trouble—they had no child. They had been married a great many years, but no little children were making their home bright by merry play and happy voices ; so Isaac prayed very earnestly to God about it.

And God answered his prayer. He said that Rebekah should have two sons, and that they should become afterwards—in many years—two

nations ; that one people should be stronger than the other people, and that the elder should serve the younger.

Not long after this, two little baby boys were born. They were twins—that means, they were both born almost at the same time. The one who was just a very little the oldest was red and hairy, and they called his name Esau. The other, who was smooth and just like any other little baby, they called Jacob. Both these names have a meaning. Esau means ‘Hairy, or rough ;’ and Jacob means ‘A supplanter’—that is, one who displaces another, or steps into another’s place. When the parents gave Jacob his name, they remembered that God had said the younger was to have the mastery over his elder brother.

When the lads were about fifteen years old, their good old grandfather Abraham died. All his life he had walked with God. He had led an upright, holy, and prayerful life, believing in and loving God with all his heart ; and he died at last in a good old age, being a hundred and seventy-five years old.

Then his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him. In the Cave of Machpelah which he had bought from Ephron, and where he had buried Sarah his dear and faithful wife, there they reverently laid down the body of him who was called the Friend of God and the Father of all them that believe.

And it came to pass after the death of Abraham that God blessed Isaac his son. And Isaac and

Rebekah took their two boys and went to live by Hagar's well.

So the lads grew up; and Esau became a clever and successful hunter. He used to go out into the fields with his bow and arrows, and shoot birds and wild beasts; and he used to shoot the wild deer and bring it home, and have it roasted and made into savoury meat for his father Isaac. The flesh of deer is called venison; and Isaac liked venison very much.

Jacob did not care for hunting. He was a plain man with simple tastes and simple habits; and he lived quietly in a tent, and took care of sheep and goats. Jacob loved God; and though, as we shall see, he was sometimes tempted to be sly, untruthful, and selfish, yet God knew all that was in his heart, and He saw that he was humble-minded, and that he really did try to walk uprightly: so God loved him.

But God did not love Esau, for Esau was wicked and had no wish to serve Him. He did not care for God's promises, and he never tried to please Him. Yet Esau was the favourite son of his good father Isaac; Was it not strange? Can you guess the reason of this?

It was because of the venison which he brought; but this was a very bad reason for loving him best. Rebekah, however, loved her younger son the best.

One day Esau had been out in the fields hunting; and he came back very tired, and quite faint for want of food. Now Jacob had just made some soup for

himself of lentils—which are a small kind of bean; and when Esau saw it he longed for it, and said to Jacob, ‘Feed me, I pray you, with that red soup, or pottage, for I am faint.’

And Jacob said, ‘If I give it to you, will you give up to me all your rights as the eldest son?’

And Esau answered, ‘Behold, I am at the point of death, and so my birthright will do me no good.’

‘Promise me then faithfully, that you will give your birthright to me!’ Jacob said.

And Esau promised. So he sold his right as the elder for a basin of soup.

Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils. And he ate and drank, and then rose up and went away; thus he despised his birthright.

But God was displeased at what he had done. Esau, as eldest son, was his father’s heir; and special blessings and privileges were to be the portion of the first-born. All the land of Canaan was promised to Abraham’s children, and it would naturally come to be the inheritance of the first-born. But it would seem as if Esau did not care for blessings that were in the future, and that he could not see; the reason no doubt being, that he did not believe in them.

But Jacob had faith, and believed all God’s promises. As his father Isaac was, of all Abraham’s children, the one most blessed by God, so Jacob wished that God’s special blessing should come on himself, and not on his elder brother. Yet he behaved very wrongly in the way he tried

to get it ; and God blessed him, not *because* of it, but *in spite* of it.

Jacob had behaved selfishly. He saw his brother in great distress for want of food, and instead of *giving* him kindly and freely the soup he had prepared, he *sold* it. This was not brotherly love ; it was not doing as he would be done by, and we shall see afterwards that this wrong-doing—as wrong-doing always does—caused him much difficulty and trouble.

Yet there was this one good thing in Jacob, he had faith to long more earnestly for spiritual than for temporal blessings. He had a greater desire to be heir of God's promises than heir to his father's riches.

After this, there was a famine in the land of Canaan. Do you know what a famine is ? It is a scarcity of food ; when men, women, and little children cannot get enough to eat. A famine is a terrible thing. People become so weak and ill from starvation that at last they lie down and die. Whenever there is a famine, hundreds and hundreds of people are killed by it ; and think how dreadful a thing it must be, to be starved to death !

So, because of the famine, Isaac left the place where he was living, and went a little further off to a place called Gerah, where the king of that country lived. And I think that when Isaac saw how scarce food was there, he must have intended to go down into Egypt ; for the Lord appeared to him, and

said, 'Do not go down into Egypt. Dwell in this land, and I will be with you, and bless you; for to you, and to your children, I will give all these countries; and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in your family, because Abraham obeyed My voice, and kept My commandments and My laws.'

So Isaac stayed in Gerah. And he sowed corn in that land; and God prospered him as He had promised, and gave him a wonderful harvest. While his neighbours scarcely reaped at all, Isaac had an abundance of corn. And he went on prospering in all that he did, so that he became very great and rich; for he had large flocks of cattle and sheep, and a very great number of servants. And the people of that land were jealous, and envied him.

Then they began to show their angry feelings by doing spiteful things. They stopped up all the wells that Abraham's servants had made, and filled them with earth. This was doing much mischief, and a great unkindness, for now the cattle were in danger of dying of thirst. But Isaac's servants digged the wells again, and called them by the same names that Abraham had given them.

The men of Gerah, however, were always quarrelling with Isaac's men about the wells, and the king at last begged Isaac to go away. He said, 'Depart from us; for you are much stronger and more prosperous than we are.'

So Isaac took Rebekah his wife, and his two

sons, Esau and Jacob, and went quite away from there. He returned to Beer-sheba, which was the place where he was born, where he grew up, and where he lived so long near to his parents' tents.

And that same night that he went back there God appeared to him. He said, 'I am the God of Abraham, your father. Fear not, for I am with you, and will bless you, and will increase your family greatly, for My servant Abraham's sake.'

These gracious words made Isaac decide to stay in Beer-sheba. So he pitched his tents there, and builded an altar, and offered sacrifices, and called upon the name of the Lord.

But now it was necessary for his servants to dig for water; for wells are scarce, and very valuable in that land, and a great deal of water is required for the flocks of cattle and sheep, as well as for household purposes. It was not easy to find springs of water; and to dig a well was a very difficult and important thing in those days. If Isaac's servants had not been able to find water, they could not have continued to live at Beer-sheba; but presently they sent this glad message to their master, 'We have found water!'

The day before they had finished digging this well, the king came from Gerah to Isaac, with one of his friends and the chief captain of his army. But Isaac was not pleased to see them, and he spoke to them angrily. 'Why do you come to me, seeing you hate me, and have sent me away from you?'

And they said, 'We saw certainly that the Lord was with you ; and so we want to make an agreement with you, and that there should be a solemn promise between us that you will do us no harm ; because we have not injured you, and have done you nothing but good, and have sent you away in peace ; for you are now the blessed of the Lord.'

When Isaac heard this, he was not angry any more. He made them a great feast, and they did eat and drink. And they rose up early in the morning, and made a solemn promise to each other ; and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace.

CHAPTER XVII.

A BLESSING STOLEN.

WHEN Esau was forty years old he did a thing which distressed his father and mother very much. He married two wives, and they were both women of Canaan.

How could he expect the blessing of God when he took his companions from a people who were exceedingly wicked, and who were under God's curse? Ah! it showed only too plainly that he did not care for God's blessing upon his marriage, nor upon his home; and this was a sore trouble and a grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah.

Yet still Isaac loved his godless son the best, and wished to give him the best blessing—the blessing of the first-born. He wished to make him his heir—to leave to him all his riches, and to pass on to him all those glorious promises of spiritual blessings of which Esau was quite unworthy, and for which he did not care.

Some years passed away, and Isaac had become a very old man. He was a hundred and thirty-five years of age (at that time his sons were seventy-five years old), and his eyes were dim, so that he could

not see. And he called Esau, his eldest son, and said to him,—

‘My son!’

And Esau answered, ‘Behold, here am I.’

And Isaac said, ‘Behold now, I am old; I do not know how soon I may die. Now therefore take, I pray you, your weapons—your quiver’ (a quiver is the case in which arrows are placed) ‘and your bow, and go out to the field, and get some venison for me; and make me the savoury meat that I like so much, and bring it to me that I may eat; then I shall bless you before I die.’

And Esau went to the field to hunt for venison, and to bring it. But Rebekah heard what Isaac had said to his son Esau, and she began to think how she might get the best blessing for her own favourite—Jacob. She thought it could only be done by deceiving her husband, who was blind and old; and she was so anxious that the younger son should get the blessing intended for Esau, that she made up her mind to steal it for him if she could.

This was her plan. She said to Jacob, ‘Behold, I heard your father speak unto Esau, your brother, saying, Bring me venison, and make me savoury meat, that I may eat, and bless you before the Lord before my death. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and do exactly what I tell you. Go to the flock, and look out two good kids of the goats; then bring them to me, and I will make savoury meat for your father, such as he likes so

much. And you shall take it to your father, that he may eat, and that he may bless you before his death.'

And Jacob said to Rebekah, his mother, 'Behold Esau, my brother, is a hairy man, and I am a smooth man ; perhaps my father will feel me, and then he will find out that I was trying to deceive him ; so I shall bring a curse upon myself, and not a blessing.'

And his mother said, 'Let the curse come upon me, my son ; only obey my voice, and do as I have said.'

Then Jacob went and brought two kids to his mother ; and she made savoury meat, as his father loved. And Rebekah took some beautiful garments which belonged to her eldest son Esau, which were with her in the house, and put them upon Jacob her younger son. And she covered his hands and his neck with the skins of the kids of the goats ; so that his hands and his neck might feel hairy, like those of his brother Esau.

When all this was done, Rebekah put into Jacob's hand the savoury meat and the bread which she had prepared.

And he came to his father and said, 'My father !'

And Isaac answered, 'Here am I ; who are you, my son ?'

And Jacob said to his father, 'I am Esau, your first-born. I have done as you bade me ; arise, I pray you, and eat of my venison, that you may bless me.'

And Isaac said unto his son, 'How is it that you have found it so quickly, my son?'

Jacob replied, 'Because the Lord your God brought it to me.'

I wonder Jacob was not afraid to say this, and to use God's name when he was sinning against God, and against his poor old father, and Esau. And is it not sad to see how he went on telling one untruth after another? Poor old Isaac could not *see*, but he could *hear*; and he did not think it sounded like Esau's voice. He was not quite satisfied yet, so he said, 'Come near, I pray you, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are indeed my very son Esau, or not.'

And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him and said, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.'

And Isaac did not find out who it was, because his hands were hairy as his brother Esau's hands. But once more he asked him, 'Are you my very son Esau?'

And again Jacob lied to his father, and said, 'I am.'

Then Isaac said, 'Bring it near to me, and I will eat of my son's venison, that my soul may bless you.'

And Jacob brought it to his father, and he did eat; and he brought him wine, and he drank. And his father Isaac said to him, 'Come near now and kiss me, my son.'

And Jacob came near and kissed him. And

he smelled the smell of his raiment (you remember, Jacob was wearing Esau's garments, and most likely they were perfumed, as was often the case in those countries), and he blessed him and said, 'See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed ; therefore God give you of the dew of heaven, so that the earth may bring forth abundantly for you, and that you may have plenty of corn and wine. Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you ; be lord over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. May God punish every one who injures you, and may He bless all those who do you good.'

This was the blessing.

But Isaac had forgotten that God had said, 'The elder shall serve the younger.' Though he was really blessing Jacob, he *thought* he was blessing Esau ; and such words as these, 'be lord over your brothers, and let your mother's sons bow down to you,' should never have been spoken to Esau, for it was against God's will.

If Rebekah, instead of deceiving her husband, had reminded him of what God had said, how much better it would have been ! But she sinned in what she did, and she made Jacob sin grievously too. They ought to have trusted God to make His own promise come true in His own way. But they chose their own crooked ways to get the blessing, and it brought them into sad trouble.

Well, it came to pass as soon as Isaac had made an end of blessing Jacob, and Jacob was scarcely

gone out from the presence of Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And he also had made savoury meat, and brought it unto his father ; and he said unto him, ' Let my father arise and eat of his son's venison, that your soul may bless me.'

And Isaac his father said to him, ' Who are you ?'

And he answered, ' I am your son, your first-born Esau.'

Then Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, ' Who ? Where is he who has hunted venison, and brought it to me, and I have eaten of all before you came, and have blessed him ? Yes, and he shall be blessed.'

Why did Isaac tremble so much ?

I think that it must have been that he remembered God's words, and felt that it was God Himself who had prevented him from giving the best blessing in the way he wished to give it. If Isaac had truly desired only to do God's will in the matter, and to put his own wishes on one side, we may be quite sure that God would never have allowed him to be so deceived. So when he now said, ' Yes, and he shall be blessed,' it is as if he saw at last that he had been trying to get his own way, but that God was determined that the blessing should fall on Jacob, and not on the son who had sold his birth-right, who had married Canaanitish women, and who had never honoured God at any time.

When Esau heard the words of his father, he

cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his father, 'Bless me, even me, also, O my father!'

And Isaac said, 'Your brother came slyly, and has taken away your blessing.'

And Esau felt exceedingly angry with Jacob, and said, 'Is he not rightly named Jacob? for he has stepped into my place these two times: he took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing! But have you not kept a blessing for me?'



And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your lord, and all his brethren have I given him for servants; and with corn and wine have I supplied him; and what shall I do now unto you my son?'

And Esau said unto his father, 'Have you but one blessing, my father? bless me, even me, also, O my father!' And Esau lifted up his voice and wept.

Then Isaac his father answered and said unto

him, 'Behold, your dwelling shall be of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. You shall have an abundance of the good things of this world, and you shall live by your sword and shall serve your brother; but it shall come to pass that, when you shall have the power, you shall set yourself free from him again.'

And Esau hated Jacob because of the blessing wherewith his father blessed him. And Esau said to himself, 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand—my father will soon die—and then I will kill my brother Jacob.'

So murder was now in Esau's heart. Like wicked Cain, first he felt jealousy of his brother, then hate, and after that came the horrible thought of murder. This is the way Satan always leads on those who listen to him and do his bidding. First comes what may be thought a little sin; then others more daring, till at last sin becomes easy.

Dear children, whenever you have been tempted into doing what is wrong—whether by an unkind word or unkind deed, or by an untruth, or by a sly or dishonest action—whatever it may be, never rest till you have confessed your fault to God, and prayed for His forgiveness, and implored His help to keep you from falling into sin again.

This is the only way to be really happy and really safe. And God will always pardon and bless you, if you ask it for His dear Son's sake, *meaning what you say.*

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WONDERFUL DREAM.

SOME one had overheard what Esau said when he threatened to kill his brother, and had told Rebekah about it. She was greatly distressed, and sent at once to call Jacob, her younger son, and said to him,—

‘Behold, your brother Esau is planning to kill you one day. Now therefore, my son, obey my voice, and arise, go quickly and secretly to Laban, my brother, who lives in Haran, and stay with him a short time till your brother’s fury turn away—until your brother’s anger turn away from you, and he forgets that which you have done to him; then I will send and fetch you home again. Why should I be deprived of you both in one day?’

Do you know what she meant by this? I will tell you. When Noah and his sons had come out of the ark, and God was blessing them, He gave them some rules, or commandments. And this was one of them: He said, ‘If one man kills another, the murderer shall be put to death. Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man.’ So Rebekah knew that if Esau were to kill his brother, Esau himself would be put to

death, according to God's law ; and thus she would lose both her sons in one day.

Rebekah did not tell Isaac what Esau was going to do ; perhaps she thought it would distress him too much. But she gave him another reason for wanting to send Jacob away to her own country. So she said to her husband,—

‘I am weary of my life, because of the daughters of Canaan. If Jacob should take a wife of the daughters of the land, as Esau has done, it will distress me all my life long.’

Isaac felt that Rebekah was right in what she said, and that Jacob ought to be sent away to his own relations far off, that he might choose a wife from the family of Shem. So he called Jacob and blessed him, and gave him a solemn charge, or order, and said to him,—

‘You shall not take a wife of the maidens of Canaan ; but arise, go to Haran, to the house of your mother's father, and take one of the daughters of Laban, your mother's brother, to be your wife. And God Almighty bless you, and make you prosperous, and increase you, that you may be a multitude of people ; and give you the blessing of Abraham—to you and to your children also, that you may inherit the land which God gave to Abraham.’

Then Isaac and Rebekah sent away Jacob, and he went out from Beer-sheba and took the way toward Haran.

Though he was heir to all those glorious promises that God had given to Abraham, yet when

Jacob left his father's dwelling he had only his staff in his hand and a little food—some oil and bread. None of his father Isaac's riches were given to him—no flocks or herds, no silver or gold—he was sent away quite alone, and quite destitute. But he had got the blessing of Abraham; and this was what he cared for most.

Rebekah thought that he was going away only for a little time; she did not know that she would never see her favourite son again in this world. It was a great number of years before Jacob returned to his father's tents again, and when he came back his mother was dead.

So Jacob set out on his journey; and I have no doubt he felt very lonely and sad as he left his old home, where he had lived quietly and contentedly for so many years. He was no longer a young man, for he was seventy-five years old; and I dare say he thought it hard to be obliged to begin a new life all by himself. Ah! if he had not deceived his father, and cheated his brother, he would never have been sent away like this: it was the consequence of his own sin.

And now the day had come to an end. The sun had set, and he could not see his way any further that evening; so he determined to rest for the night in the place to which he had come. He took a stone, and arranged it for a pillow, and then he lay down to sleep. It was not a very pleasant bed, but he had a very sweet and wonderful dream there.

This was his dream. He saw a ladder set up

on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven ; and behold ! the angels of God were ascending and descending (that is, going up and down) on it. And behold ! the Lord stood above it, and said, ' I am the Lord God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac ; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and to your children ; and your family shall be as the dust of the earth for number, and shall spread every way—to the west and to the east, and to the north and to the south ; and in you and in your children shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And behold, I am with you, and will keep you in all places where you are going, and will bring you again into this land ; for I will not leave you until I have done that which I have spoken to you of.'

Was it not kind and gracious of God to cheer the sad heart of the lonely wanderer by repeating to him all those promises which Jacob valued so much ? and also by assuring him that He would take care of him in his wanderings, and bring him back safely to his father's tents again ? For though it was a dream, God sent it ; and Jacob knew that the words he heard in his dream were God's own words to him.

When Jacob awoke out of his sleep he said, ' Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not !' And he was afraid. I think, when he felt the nearness of God to him, he then saw his own sinfulness, and how unworthy he was of so much lovingkindness and favour. He said, ' How dreadful is this place ! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'

And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil on the top of it. He had nothing else to give to God as a thank-offering, so he poured upon this stone the oil that he had brought for his journey. And he called the name of the place Beth-el, which means, 'The house of God.'

And Jacob made a very solemn promise. He said, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in the way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and raiment (or clothes) to put on, and if the Lord will be my God, then this stone which I have set up for a pillar shall be God's house; and of all that Thou shalt give me, I will surely give the tenth part unto Thee.'

After this, Jacob went on his journey again. He was no longer solitary and sad. That wonderful dream had given him many happy and comforting thoughts. God had said to him, 'I am with you;' so indeed he was not alone, as he had fancied himself to be. And God had promised, 'I will never leave you,' so he might feel quite free from anxious care and anxiety in the future.

Then, too, by the vision of angels which he saw going up and down the ladder, from heaven to earth, it would seem as if God had taught him that His angels are ministering spirits, and that they are always about the path of those who put their trust in the Lord.

CHAPTER XIX.

JACOB BECOMES RICH.

IT took Jacob a great many days to get to his journey's end, for it was about four hundred miles from Beer-sheba to Haran ; but at last he came into the land of the people of the East.

And he looked, and behold there was a well in the field, and lo, three flocks of sheep were lying by it. This was the well to which all the cattle were brought for water ; but just now a great stone was upon the well's mouth.

You remember, I have already explained to you that in those hot countries wells are very valuable, for there is often a great scarcity of water. Sometimes the wells are locked up or fastened, and are only opened once or twice a day, when all the flocks are gathered together ; for it is necessary to be very careful that there should be no waste of water. Sometimes the wells are covered over with a large stone, or with boards to keep the dust and sand from drifting in.

When Jacob saw the men waiting beside the well, with their sheep, he said to them, 'My brethren, where do you come from?'

And they answered, 'We come from Haran.'

Jacob must have felt very glad to hear this : for Haran was the very town to which he was going. Then he asked them, 'Do you know Laban, whose grandfather was Nahor, Abraham's brother?'

'Yes,' they replied ; 'we know him.'

'Is he well?' Jacob asked.

And they said, 'He is well ; and behold, here is Rachel his daughter coming with the sheep.'

And Jacob said, 'It is not time that the cattle should be gathered together yet ; why do you not give water to the sheep, and then go and feed them?'

And they answered, 'We must not draw any water until all the flocks are gathered together, and till they roll the stone away from the well ; then we may draw water for the sheep.'

While Jacob was talking with the men, Rachel came with her father's sheep ; for she kept them. And it came to pass when Jacob saw Rachel, the daughter of Laban his mother's brother, and the sheep of Laban his mother's brother, that Jacob went near and rolled away the stone from the well.* Then he drew water for all Laban's flock. It was hard work to draw so much water ; but Jacob was glad to do it for Rachel, to help her.

And Jacob kissed Rachel ; and he lifted up his

* It is supposed that this well was private property, and belonged to Laban, and therefore could not be opened till Rachel appeared with her father's flock.

voice and wept. It was not that he was unhappy now—that was not why he wept ; they were tears of thankfulness and gladness. He was thankful to God for bringing him safely on his journey and guiding him to the right place ; and he was so glad to see one of his relations again ; for, you know, Rachel was his cousin.

And Jacob told Rachel that he was Rebekah's son, and that Laban was his uncle ; and she ran and told her father.

And it came to pass, when Laban heard that Jacob his sister's son had come, that he ran to meet him, and embraced him, and kissed him, and brought him to his house. And he told Laban all that had happened to him.

And Laban said, ' Surely you are of our family, and belong to us.'

And Jacob stayed with his uncle about a month. But while he was there he was not idle. At his own old home that he had left, he had been a shepherd ; so now he took care of Laban's sheep, and made himself useful.

At last Laban said to Jacob, ' Because you are my nephew, is that any reason why you should serve me for nothing ? Tell me what wages I shall give you.'

Now, Laban had two daughters ; the name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel. And Rachel was very beautiful, and Jacob loved her very much ; and he wanted her to be his wife, so that she might be his companion always.

So he said to Laban, 'I will be your servant for seven years, if you will give me Rachel your younger daughter to be my wife.'

And Laban answered, 'Yes, I will do as you wish ; so stay with me.'

And Jacob served Laban very faithfully and well for seven years ; and it seemed to him only as a few days, because he loved her so much. And at the end of the seven years he said to Laban, 'Give me my wife, for I have served out my full time.'

Then Laban made a great feast—a marriage feast—and invited all his friends and neighbours to it. And the bride was covered with a long veil from her head to her feet, which quite hid her face from every one ; and after the wedding she was taken to Jacob's tent. Then the veil was taken off ; and behold it was Leah to whom he had been married, and not to Rachel whom he loved.

Jacob was very angry at having been so cheated, and he went to Laban and said, 'What is this that you have done unto me ? Did I not serve you for Rachel ? why then have you deceived me ?'

And Laban said, 'It is not the custom in our country that the younger should be married before the elder. But I will give Rachel also to be your wife, if you will be my servant for seven more years.'

It was very wrong of Laban not to have told Jacob before, what the custom of that country was. But Jacob loved Rachel so much that he was willing to serve seven more years for her. So now he had two wives ; but Leah he did not love.

God is so pitiful and kind, that when He saw that Leah was not loved, He comforted her by making her the mother of several sons; and Rachel envied her sister, for Rachel had no children. But after many long years God remembered Rachel and hearkened to her prayer, and gave her a little son and she called his name Joseph.

When we read, 'God *remembered* Rachel,' it does not mean that He had forgotten her at any time, or that He had not listened to her prayer before. He was watching over her, and caring for her, all the time; but He did not think it good for her to have her wish just *when* she wanted it. Rachel had asked very fretfully, and very impatiently, for a little baby-boy; and God had taught her patience by making her wait a great many years before He saw the right time had come for granting her request.

And now Jacob was beginning to think longingly of his old home in Canaan, and to wish to return there, and to see his parents once more. He had finished his term of service, and had been Laban's shepherd for fourteen years; and so, as soon as Joseph was born, Jacob said to Laban,—

'Send me away, that I may go to my own place, and to my country. Give me my wives and my children, for whom I have served you, and let me go; for you know how useful I have been to you.'

But Laban did not want Jacob to go away. He found him such a faithful servant and son-in-law,

that he felt as if he could not spare him. He had prospered so much since Jacob had been with him, that he would gladly have kept him always; not because he loved him, but because he found him so useful; for Laban was a very selfish man. So he said to Jacob,—

‘I pray you, if I have found favour in your eyes, stay with me still; for I have learned by experience that the Lord has blessed me for your sake. Tell me what wages you would like, and I will give it.’

And Jacob said, ‘You know how I have served you, and what care I have taken of your cattle; for you had but little before I came, and now it is increased into a multitude; and the Lord has blessed you since my coming. And now, when shall I provide for my own house also?’

Laban said, ‘What shall I give you?’

Then Jacob said, ‘If you will give me all the cattle, and sheep, and goats, that are brown, and speckled, and spotted, that shall be born in the flocks and herds, then I will take care of your flocks again.’

And Laban said, ‘I will very gladly do this.’

So Jacob remained with Laban, according to the agreement, and served him faithfully for six more years. But Laban was not honest and true. When he saw that God was making Jacob to prosper exceedingly, and that he had much cattle, and maid-servants and men-servants, and camels and asses, he tried in every way to cheat him. Just as he was dishonest about Jacob’s marriage (giving him Leah instead of Rachel), so he was dishonest

about Jacob's wages. He did not keep to his agreement, but changed Jacob's wages ten times.

And Laban's sons became jealous, too. They said, 'Jacob has taken away all that was our father's; it is our father's property that has made him such a great man.'

And Jacob heard what they said; and he saw that Laban was quite changed to him now, and was looking at him with very unfriendly eyes.

It is not pleasant to be cheated and deceived; and Jacob found it to be very bitter and painful. Do you think, that when he was suffering from Laban's dishonesty he ever thought of the cruel way he himself had deceived his own kind old father? I am quite sure he did; and I am quite sure, also, that he repented with all his heart of all that he had done that was dishonest and untrue. The older he grew, the more holy he became; and though he had faults, yet he truly loved God, and tried to walk in His ways. And God loved him. A verse in the Bible tells us that God said, 'Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.'

CHAPTER XX.

JACOB'S FLIGHT.

ONE day, as Jacob was taking care of Laban's flocks, God spoke to him, and said, 'Return unto the land of your fathers, and to your family, and I will be with you.'

And Jacob sent and called Rachel and Leah to the field where he was and when they came, he said to them, 'I see your father is not as friendly to me as he used to be; but the God of my fathers has been with me. And you know that with all my power I have served your father; and your father has deceived me, and has changed my wages ten times; but God would not let him hurt me. For He has taken care of me, and it is He who has taken the cattle of your father, and given them to me. If your father said, The speckled shall be your wages, then all the cattle that were born were speckled; and if he said, The striped cattle shall be your wages, then all that were born were striped.' So this was God's doing.

'And the angel of God spoke to me in a dream, saying, Jacob; and I said, Here am I. And He said, I have seen all that Laban is doing to you.

I am the God of Beth-el, where you anointed (or, poured oil on) the pillar, and where you made Me a very solemn promise ; now arise, get you out from this land, and return unto the land of your kindred.'

When Rachel and Leah heard Jacob's story they said, 'We have nothing more to do with our father's house. He does not care for us: he counts us as strangers, and he has taken away what belonged to us. For all the riches which God has taken from our father, that is ours, and our children's ; now then, whatsoever God has said unto you, do.'

Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels ; and he carried away all the cattle that belonged to him, and all the goods which he had gotten in that country, to go to Isaac, his father, in the land of Canaan.

He did not tell Laban he was going away, because he could not trust him. Laban at that time had gone to shear his sheep ; and Rachel took the opportunity of going into her father's house and stealing some images, or idols, which belonged to her father. But Jacob did not know what she had done.

So he fled with his two wives and his children, and his menservants and maidservants, and his flocks and herds ; and he passed over the river, and set his face to go toward Canaan.

Three days passed away before Laban knew that Jacob had gone ; and when he found that

he had taken his family and all his goods, he was exceedingly angry. He missed his images, too, and thought that Jacob had stolen them; so he took some men with him, and set out in great haste, and with very unkind, angry feelings in his heart, to overtake Jacob.

For six days Laban and his party journeyed on without coming up to him; but that night (the sixth night) God came to Laban in a dream, and said to him,—

‘Take care that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad.’ God meant that Laban was not to try and persuade Jacob to go back to Haran, either by kind words or by threats.

Next day Laban went on with his journey again, and then at last he met Jacob, who had pitched his tents, and was resting his family and his flocks after their long journey. They had been travelling for six days, and this was the seventh day of rest. Laban was longing to say bitter words to Jacob, and to do him some unkindness, but he did not dare to disobey God, so he only blamed him very gently for going away so secretly. He said,—

‘What have you done, that you have gone away unawares to me, and have carried away my daughters as if they were slaves? Why did you escape so secretly from me, and did not tell me, that I might have sent you away with songs and with music? And why did you not let me kiss my grandchildren and my daughters before you left? You have done foolishly in acting like this;

and it is in my power to do you harm ; but the God of your fathers spoke to me last night, saying, Take care that you do not speak to Jacob either good or bad. . And now, though you do wish to go because you are sorely longing after your father's house, yet why have you stolen my gods ?'

And Jacob answered and said to Laban, ' I was afraid to tell you I was going away, because I thought you would perhaps take your daughters—my wives—away from me by force. But as for your idols, if you can find them with any one here, let the person be put to death who has taken them. Look and see if there is anything here that belongs to you.' For you remember Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

So Laban went into Jacob's tent, and into Leah's tent, and into the tents of the two maid-servants; but he did not find them. Then he went into Rachel's tent ; but she had hidden the images so carefully that though he searched all the tent he could not find them.

Then Jacob was very much offended with Laban, and very angry ; and he spoke to him sharply, and said, 'What is my trespass ? what is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued after me ? You have searched all my tents, and what have you found amongst the household stuff that belongs to you ? Set it out here before your people and my people, that they may judge between us both.'

And now he went on to complain of all the bad treatment he had received at Laban's hands ever

since he had been with him. He said, 'These twenty years have I been with you ; I have taken the greatest care of your flocks, and if any of the animals were torn by wild beasts, or if they were stolen by day, or stolen by night, I bore the loss of it, for you always made me accountable for it. Thus I was : in the day I was exhausted by the heat, and at night I suffered from the frost and cold ; and my sleep departed from my eyes.

'Thus have I been twenty years in your house. I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your cattle ; and you have changed my wages ten times. Except the God of my fathers, the God of Abraham, and the revered One '—that is, God—'of Isaac had been with me, surely you would now have sent me away empty. God has seen my affliction, and how hard I have worked, and He rebuked you yesternight.'

Laban could not deny anything that Jacob said, for he knew it was all true. But he was too proud to own that he was in the wrong, or to ask Jacob to forgive him. He only said, 'These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that you see is mine. Now, therefore, come and let us make an agreement, I and you ; and let it be for a witness between me and you.'

Though Laban had said that everything was his, it was not so ; for Jacob had paid for all, by twenty years of hard and faithful service. However, Jacob did not make any further complaint,

and he was quite willing to make the agreement Laban wanted. He took a stone and set it up for a pillar, and then he said to his brethren, 'Gather stones,' and they took stones and made a great heap.

And Laban said, 'The Lord watch between me and you when we are absent one from another. Behold this heap and this pillar which is between me and you, and let them be witness that I will not pass over this heap to you, and that you will not pass over this heap to me, for harm. The God of Abraham and the God of Nahor judge between us.'

Then Jacob made a solemn promise to do as Laban said, and to keep the agreement. And Jacob offered a sacrifice at that place, and called Laban and his brethren to eat bread with him there. This was the custom when they wanted the agreement to be very solemn and very binding, or firm. So they did eat bread there, and remained in that place all night.

And early in the morning Laban rose up, and kissed his daughters and their sons, and blessed them. And Laban departed and went back to Haran.

After this, Jacob went on his journey again with a thankful heart, because God had saved him from Laban's anger, and had made them to part friends. And as he went on his way, the angels of God met him. We do not know with what appearance they came, but Jacob knew they

were the angels of God, and he said, 'This is God's host'—or army.

How wonderful was God's love and kindness to Jacob! And how often He gave him fresh tokens of His unceasing care and watchfulness over him! By the angels that he had seen in his dream, ascending and descending upon the ladder, God had taught him that His angels were always about him. But now he was permitted to see them, not in a dream, but with his own eyes, face to face.

Is it not sweet to think that God and His angels are also with *us* continually? It is written in the Psalms, 'The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them.' And the Lord Jesus said, 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.'

How careful it should make us, both in what we say and in what we do, when we remember that God's eye is ever upon us.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HAPPY MEETING.

AS Jacob journeyed on, he was now coming to a part of the country where his brother Esau lived; for Esau had gone away from Beer-sheba, and was not now living near his father Isaac's tents. And Jacob was afraid to meet his brother, for he did not know if he had forgiven him about the birthright, and the blessing, of which Jacob had robbed him. So he sent some men with a very humble message to his brother; and he commanded them, saying,

'Thus shall you say to my lord Esau: Your servant Jacob has sent us to tell you that he has been with Laban, and has stayed there until now; and he has oxen and asses, flocks, and men-servants and women-servants; and he has sent us to tell my lord, that he may find grace in your sight.'

Then the messengers went to the land of Seir where Esau was, and told him all Jacob's words. And they returned to Jacob again, and said, 'We came to your brother Esau, and also he is coming to meet you, and four hundred men with him.'

When Jacob heard this, he was greatly afraid and distressed; and he divided the people that were with him, and the flocks and herds, and the

camels, into two bands ; for he said ' If Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the other company which is left shall escape.'

Then Jacob prayed and said, ' O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the Lord who said unto me, Return unto your country and to your family, and I will deal well with you ; I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth which Thou hast showed unto Thy servant ; for I had only my staff when I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become two bands. Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau ; for I am afraid of him, lest he will come and kill me, and the mother with the children. And Thou didst say, I will surely do you good, and make your children as the sand of the sea, which cannot be numbered for multitude.'

When Jacob had finished his prayer he went amongst his cattle and put apart a great number of them, as a present for Esau his brother. There were two hundred and twenty goats, and two hundred and twenty sheep, thirty camels (each with its young one), forty cows and ten bulls, and thirty asses. All these animals he gave into the care of his servants, every drove by themselves ; and he said to his servants, ' Pass over before me and put a space between drove and drove.'

And he commanded the foremost (those that went in front), saying, ' When Esau my brother meets you, and asks you saying, Who is your master ? and where are you going ? and to whom do these cattle

belong? then you shall say, They are your servant Jacob's; it is a present sent unto my lord Esau; and behold, also, he is behind us.'

And Jacob commanded the men that had care of the second and the third droves, and all that followed after them, to say the same words. And he said to them, 'This is the way you shall speak unto Esau when you find him. And say, moreover, Behold, your servant Jacob is behind us.'

For Jacob said, 'I will make him feel kindly towards me because of the present that goes before me, and afterwards I will see his face; perhaps he will be friendly with me.'

So the present went over before him; and he himself remained behind in that place that night. And in the night he rose up and took his two wives, and his two women-servants, and his eleven sons, and all that he had, and sent them over the brook for greater safety.

And Jacob was left alone. I think he must have stayed behind by himself that night, that he might again pray to God with all his heart to be kept in safety, and that Esau might not hurt either his wives or his children. He had done all that he could think of to make his brother friendly to him; but he knew that, unless God helped him, all his own efforts would be useless.

And while he was there, praying to God alone in the darkness, a man came to him and wrestled, or struggled, with him. He looked like a man, but it was an angel; yet not a created

angel, but even the Angel of the Covenant, Jehovah Jesus Himself, in the form of a man. Happy, blessed Jacob !

And the Angel wrestled with him until the dawning of the day. The struggle lasted a long time, but Jacob would not let go his hold. Then the Angel said to Jacob, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.'

And Jacob said, 'I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me.'

And the Angel said, 'What is your name ?'

And he answered, 'Jacob.'

And He said, 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel ;' that means, 'A prince of God ;' 'for as a prince you have power with God and with men, and have prevailed.'

Then Jacob asked Him, saying, 'Tell me, I pray Thee, Thy name.'

But the Angel said, 'Why is it that you ask after My name ?' And He blessed Jacob there.

And He touched the hollow of Jacob's thigh, so that he became lame ; and Jacob was always lame after that to the day of his death. Do you think he was sorry and pitied himself for his lameness ?

Oh, no. He felt how much honour had been put upon him, and he was full of gratitude that his life had been preserved in that struggle. Jacob had now the constant memory, every day, of the wonderful love and condescension of Him who came afterwards to our earth, to be our dear and blessed Saviour and Redeemer. Every day his lameness would remind him of that strange night

when he wrestled with the Angel Jehovah till the dawning of the day.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel, or 'The Face of God;' for he said, 'I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.'

When the sun had risen, Jacob went on again with his company. And he lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, Esau came, and with him four hundred men. Then Jacob quickly arranged his party, and divided the children to Leah, and to Rachel, and to the two maidservants. And he put the servants and their children first; and Leah and her children after; and Rachel and Joseph last of all.

And Jacob passed over before them, and bowed himself to the ground seven times, until he came near to his brother. And Esau forgot his anger and ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him; and both Esau and Jacob wept.

When the twin-brothers saw each other again, after twenty long years of absence, all unkindness was forgotten. Esau had left his home intending to fight with Jacob; but God had touched his heart, and now nothing but kind words passed between them. And Esau lifted up his eyes, and saw the women and the children; and he said to Jacob,—

'Who are these with you?'

Jacob answered, 'These are the children that God has graciously given to your servant.'

Then the maidservants came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And

Leah also came near with her children, and they bowed themselves; and after, came Joseph near, and Rachel, and they bowed themselves.

And Esau said, 'What is the meaning of all those cattle that I met?'

Jacob answered, 'They are a present to my lord.'

And Esau said, 'I have enough, my brother; keep all the cattle for yourself.'

But Jacob said, 'No, I pray you, if now I have found grace in your sight, then receive my present at my hand; for I have seen your face, and you have been pleased with me. Take, I pray you, my present that is brought to you; because God has been gracious to me, and because I have enough.'

And Jacob urged him so much that Esau took it.

Then Esau said to his brother, 'Let us now take our journey together, and I will go on first.'

But Jacob answered, 'My lord, you know that the children are very young, and that I have a great many little lambs and kids and calves; and if we were to drive them too fast, they would die. I pray you, my lord, to go on first before your servant; and I will follow softly after, according as the cattle and the children are able to bear, until I come unto my lord to Seir.'

And Esau said, 'Let me then leave some of my men with you, to protect you.'

But Jacob did not need his brother's men of war to guard him. He knew that God had promised to take care of him, and that God's angels were about his path; so he said to Esau, 'Indeed

I do not need your men ; only let me find grace in the sight of my lord.'

So Esau went back to his own home at Seir, and Jacob journeyed quietly on, till he came to a place called Succoth. There he pitched his tents, and made booths, or sheds, for his cattle. But he did not stay long there, for he wanted to get back to the land of promise. So after resting for a little time, he went on again, till he came in peace and safety to the city called Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan.

Once more, then, Jacob was in the promised land—in Canaan—which he had left in so much loneliness, and poverty, and fear. How graciously God had protected and blessed him ! and how faithfully He had kept His promise to bring him back again !

Now that Jacob had returned to the country which God had promised to him and to his children, he bought a field near to the city of Shechem, that he might pitch his tent there. Jacob gave a hundred pieces of money for this field ; but there was some quarrelling about it, after the agreement was made, and Jacob—though he was generally a very gentle and peaceable man—was obliged to fight with his bow and with his sword, before he could gain quiet possession of the field.*

Then he pitched his tents, and built an altar there, and called it El-elohe-Israel ; which means, 'God the God of Israel.'

* Gen. xlviii. 22.

CHAPTER XXII.

AT BETH-EL AGAIN.

IT was not wise of Jacob to pitch his tents so near to one of the wicked cities of Canaan. We know what trouble it brought upon the family of just Lot, when he went to live in Sodom ; because some of his children learned the evil ways of the people of the city. And Jacob suffered, too, from the same cause.

Seven years passed quietly away, and then the trouble came.

Jacob had a daughter whose name was Dinah ; and she went out to see the daughters of the land—to visit them, and to make friends with them. I have told you before, how wrong it is for people who love God, to choose for their companions those who are disobeying and grieving Him every day. There is great danger in doing so, for it is almost sure to lead God's children into sin.

Just so it was with Dinah. She was led into wrong-doing by her godless companions and her new friends in Shechem. And when her brothers heard about it, they were so grieved and angry that two of them took their swords, and went into

the city, and killed every man that was there ; and they took all the women to be slaves. Then they took away all the sheep and oxen and asses that belonged to the people of Shechem, and they took away all the riches that they found in their houses.

Was it wrong of Dinah's two brothers to do this ?

Yes. What they had done was very displeasing to God ; and their father Jacob, in speaking about it many years afterwards, said, ' Cursed was their anger, for it was fierce ; and their wrath, for it was cruel.'

Jacob was greatly grieved at what his proud and angry sons had done ; and he was afraid, too, that the other people of the land would come and fight with him, because so many of their family were killed.

But God kept him from this danger ; yet He would not let him remain any longer in that place.

Was it not strange that Jacob should have been so long in the land of Canaan without having gone to see his old father Isaac ? and without having gone to Beth-el where he dreamt that wonderful dream, and where he made such solemn promises to God ? Had he but gone to either of these places, he would have been saved from all the sadness and sorrow he suffered from the conduct of his daughter and of his two sons at Shechem.

But now God reminds him of the pillar he had set up that first night after he had been sent away by his father and mother to go away to Haran. And God said,—

‘Arise, go up to Beth-el, and dwell there ; and make there an altar unto God, who appeared to you when you fled,’ or ran away, ‘from the face of your brother Esau.’

Then Jacob said unto his household, and to every one that was with him, ‘Put away all the strange gods that are among you. And wash yourselves, and change your garments ; and let us arise, and go up to Beth-el. And I will make there an altar unto God, who answered me in the day of my distress, and who was with me in the way that I went.’

Who would have thought that strange gods—idols—would have been found in Jacob’s home ! Does not this show us how busy Satan always is, and how he tries to tempt people away from the true God ? Though Jacob himself loved and trusted God with all his heart, yet there were some in his house who were idolaters. Then there were the images that Rachel had stolen from her father ; and most likely there were many others that had been taken from the houses of the people of Shechem.

But when Jacob had commanded his household to put away all their strange gods, they brought to him all their idols, and all the earrings that were in their ears that had on them the figures of the idols. And Jacob hid them. He buried them under an oak-tree that was near the city, that they might never be found again.

Then Jacob took up his tents, and with all

his family, and all his cattle, he journeyed on towards Beth-el. And God made all the people that were in the cities round about them to be in terror and afraid; so that they did not dare to pursue after the sons of Jacob. And in this way God kept His chosen people safely, till they arrived in peace at Beth-el.

It was not difficult to find the exact spot where Jacob had lain down to sleep, so many years ago, with only a bare stone for his pillow. You remember he had set up that stone as a mark, or pillar, and that he had poured oil on it, and had called the place God's house—Beth-el. And now, when he returned there again, with wives and children, and tents, and cattle in abundance, he built an altar to the Lord, as God commanded him.

While they were at Beth-el, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, died. Do you remember that when Abraham's faithful servant Eliezer went to Haran to find a wife for Isaac in his master's family, and when Rebekah said she would return with him to be Isaac's faithful wife and companion, her nurse went with her to the land of Canaan? The name of that nurse was Deborah.

We do not know when she came to Jacob; but most likely she came while he was at Beth-el; for Beth-el was not far from Beer-sheba, where Isaac and Rebekah were living when Jacob left them. Perhaps she had come to tell him of his mother's death; for we may be quite sure she never would

have left Rebekah, had she still been living. With many tears they buried Deborah under an oak-tree. She had been a faithful and loving servant to his mother, and Jacob mourned for her. They grieved and wept so much over her grave, that the place was called 'The Oak of Weeping.'

And now, once more God appeared to Jacob, and blessed him. And God said,—

'Your name is Jacob; your name shall not be called Jacob any more, but Israel shall be your name.'

God went on talking to him, and said, 'I am God Almighty; your family shall multiply exceedingly, till you shall become a company of nations; and kings shall be of your family. And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac; to you will I give it, and to your children after you.'

When God had spoken these words of blessing and promise, He went up from him again into heaven. And Jacob set up another pillar of stone in the place where God had talked with him, and he poured out a drink-offering to the Lord (the drink-offering was a certain measure of wine), and he poured oil on the pillar.

After this, Jacob took up his tents again, to return to his father Isaac. But while he was on the way, a sorrow came to him, greater than any he had ever known before.

Rachel, his dear and favourite wife—the person he loved best in the whole world—for whom he had toiled seven years, and thought them but as a

few days, so great was the love he bore her—Rachel died. Just before her death, a little baby-boy, her second son, was born ; and Jacob called his name Benjamin, which means ‘The son of my right hand.’ Jacob had more tender affection for the two boys of his beloved Rachel, than he had for either of his other ten sons.

We may imagine how sore was poor Jacob’s heart, when he had lost the wife he loved so much ! He would have wished to lay her dear body in the Cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah were buried ; but he was obliged to bury her in the place where she died. Then he set up a pillar over her grave, that the spot might always be known ; and even to this day, in the land of Canaan (which is now called Palestine, or the Holy Land), Rachel’s grave may be seen.

At last, Jacob came to his blind old father Isaac. At this time Isaac had left Beer-sheba, and was living at Mamre, near to the city of Hebron, where Abraham and Sarah had lived so long. Here it was that Jacob now lived,* near to his father ; and when, many years after, the good old patriarch died, his two sons, Esau and Jacob, buried him in the Cave of Machpelah, where the body of Rebekah his wife had already been laid.

* The death of Isaac did not occur till many years after Joseph had been sold into Egypt. He died at the age of 180.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BROTHER SOLD.

I WILL now tell you the names of Jacob's sons. Reuben the first-born, Simeon and Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun ; these were all Leah's sons. And the sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin ; these two were the youngest of them all. Then, besides these, Jacob had four other sons ; Dan and Naphtali, and Gad and Asher. These all lived with their father in the vale of Hebron.

Jacob's sons were shepherds ; and Joseph too, as soon as he was old enough, was sent out into the fields to help his brothers to feed the flocks.

Now of all his sons, Jacob loved Joseph the most. He was the child of the only wife he ever really loved, or cared to marry (for you remember how Laban deceived him, when he made him marry Leah) ; and also Joseph was more upright and true than his elder brothers. When he was with them, out in the fields, he saw them doing many wrong things, and he thought their father ought to know it. So Joseph told him of all their wicked conduct, and this made them dislike him very much.

Besides this, they had another reason for hating

him. Their father Jacob, to show how much he loved his favourite son, gave him a coat of many colours. This was a mark of very great distinction and honour; and, as I told you before, it is supposed also to have been a sign that the person wearing it, was intended to be his father's heir. All these things made Joseph's brothers so angry and jealous, that they could not speak peaceably to him; they hated him, and were rough and unkind to him.

One night Joseph dreamed a very strange dream, and he told it to his brothers. He said to them, 'Hear, I pray you, this dream which I have dreamed. I thought we were all in the field, binding sheaves; and lo, my sheaf arose and stood upright, and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and bowed low to my sheaf.'

Do you know what a sheaf is? When the ripe corn is cut, and gathered and tied up into bundles, then each bundle is called a sheaf.

Joseph's brothers were very angry when they heard this dream, and they said, scornfully, 'Do you indeed think that you will reign over us? and do you really suppose that you will have the mastery over us?' And they hated him yet the more for his dreams and for his words.

After this he had another strange dream, which he told to his brothers. He said, 'Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun, and the moon, and the eleven stars, bowed down to me.'

Joseph told this dream to his father, as well as

to his brothers ; and his father rebuked him gently, and said, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I, and your mother, and your brothers, indeed, come to bow down ourselves to you to the earth?'

And his brothers envied him. But his father thought a great deal about this dream, and the strangeness of it, and wondered what it could really mean.

You know, when people have large flocks of sheep and goats and cattle to take care of, they are obliged to take them from place to place to get fresh grass for them to eat. So, after a time, Joseph's brothers took their father's flock to Shechem, to feed them there. Shechem was the place where two of them had so cruelly killed all the men that were in the town ; and, I think, their father must have been anxious about them, for fear the people of that country should fight against them, because of that cruel deed. So he said one day to Joseph,—

'Your brothers are feeding the flock in Shechem. Come, and I will send you to them.'

Though he had told his father of his brothers' wicked doings, it is evident that he could never have told him of their unkindness to himself, or Jacob would have been afraid to send him alone, so far away, amongst them all. But Jacob never thought there could be any danger, and Joseph was not afraid. He was quite ready and willing to go wherever he was sent, so he answered brightly,—

‘ Here am I.’

And Jacob said, ‘ Go, I pray you, see whether it be well with your brothers, and well with the flocks ; and bring me word again.’

Obediently, and with a light heart, Joseph set off to do his father’s bidding. How little could either of them know, when he left his father’s tents that day, that he would never return to that home any more ; and that years and years would pass away, before he should again see that dear father’s face !

Without any fear of coming evil, Joseph passed on, out of the vale of Hebron, till he came to Shechem ; but his brothers were nowhere to be seen. He wandered about in the fields, looking for them, but he could not find them. At last a man saw him as he was wandering about, and asked him,—

‘ For what are you looking ?’

Joseph answered, ‘ I am looking for my brothers. Tell me, I pray you, where they feed their flocks.’

And the man said, ‘ They are gone from here ; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan.’

So Joseph went after his brothers, and found them in Dothan.

But while he was still a long way off, his brothers saw him, as he was crossing the valley to meet them ; and at the sight of him, wearing the coat of many colours, all their bitter jealous feelings grew more strong. They hated him so intensely, that now their only wish was to kill him. They

were all so far from home, and Joseph was now so completely in their power, they thought they could manage it without its being found out.

So they began to plan how it was to be done. They said one to another, 'Look, this dreamer is coming. Come now, therefore, let us kill him and throw him into some large pit or hole; and then we will say that a savage animal has eaten him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams.'

All of the wicked brothers agreed to this plan, except Reuben the eldest. He was shocked at the thought of killing his young brother; yet he was not brave enough to reproach them for their horrible cruelty and wickedness, and to say he would not allow him to be touched. He only tried to think of some way by which he might save Joseph, without offending his other brothers. So he said to them,—

'Do not let us kill him. Shed no blood, but throw him into this pit that is here in this lonely place in the wilderness; and do not let us hurt him.' For Reuben intended to take him out of the pit again, secretly; and to take him back to his father.

As Joseph walked along, with only kind thoughts in his heart, to carry his father's message to those wicked men, he little knew all the cruel things they were planning against him. But their scowling, angry faces, must have frightened him a little, when he came near enough to notice them; and then, in another moment they had

seized hold of him roughly, and had pulled off from him his many-coloured coat.

After this, they dragged him along to a deep pit that was near; and though he begged and implored them, in an agony of terror and distress, to let him alone, and to let him go free, they would not listen, but cast him into the pit.

Then they coolly sat down to eat bread. But Reuben had gone away. He could not bear to hear the poor lad's sorrowful entreaties, and to see his tears; and he felt he could not eat while his young brother was in such misery.

The others were still sitting near the pit eating their meal, when they looked up and saw a company of Ishmaelites, with their camels, coming that way. They had with them some spices and balm and myrrh, which they were carrying down into Egypt to sell there. And now a fresh thought came into the minds of these cruel men; and Judah said to his brothers,—

‘What good will it do us if we kill our brother, or if we leave him in this pit to starve to death? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and do not let us hurt him; for after all he is our brother.’

And his brethren were content to do as Judah had said. So they lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and when the Ishmaelites passed by, they sold him to them for twenty pieces of silver. And the Ishmaelites took him, and carried him down into Egypt to be a slave.

As I told you just now, Reuben was not there

when all this happened. But some time afterwards, when his brothers were out of sight, he went to the pit to draw up poor Joseph, and to take him back to his father again. He looked in, and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit! In great distress and grief he tore his clothes. I must explain to you that in that country it is a sign of great sorrow and mourning to tear the clothes; and Reuben showed by this, how bitterly he grieved.

He went at once to his brothers, and said to them, 'The child is gone—he is not in the pit; and I, what shall I do? where shall I go?'

I suppose they told him then, what they had done; and perhaps they offered him a share of the money, but I am quite sure he could never bear to touch it.

And now they began to consult together what lie they should tell their father, so that he might not think *they* had done anything to Joseph. This is what they did. They took Joseph's coat of many colours, and they killed a kid of the goats, and dipped the coat in the blood. Then they carried the coat, all covered with blood, to their father, and said to him,—

'We found this; do you think it can really be Joseph's coat or not?'

When Jacob saw it, he knew it at once, and a terrible pain came into his heart. He said, 'It is my son's coat; a wild beast has devoured him; Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces.'

And Jacob rent his clothes, and put a coarse kind of cloth, called sackcloth, upon him (to wear sackcloth is another sign of grief); and he mourned for his beloved son many days.

And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted. He said, 'I will go down into the grave unto my son mourning.'

Thus his father wept for him.

See, dear children, how one sin unrepented of leads to many! As it was with Cain, and as it was with Esau, so it was with Joseph's brothers: angry feelings, unchecked, led to hatred; then to murder (for they had murder in their hearts, though they did not really kill Joseph), and deceit and lying.

These wicked brothers could see their poor old father's grief; and yet their hearts were so hard that they never confessed their sin, and cheered his heart by telling him that his favourite son was not really dead. And Reuben kept their guilty secret, because he was afraid of making his brothers angry. Reuben was a coward.

Does this story of Joseph remind you of Another, who, because He told people of their evil deeds, was hated, then roughly and rudely spoken to, afterwards sold, and then *really* murdered?

It was the Lord Jesus who suffered all this for us, and He bore it willingly. *His* coat was taken from Him, and the soldiers cast lots for it. *He*

was put into a pit (the grave) ; but in three days He rose again.

And now He ever lives to make intercession—that means, to pray—for us ! Even for murderers, if they repent, and if they ask God to forgive them for Christ's sake. You remember He prayed in all His agony on the cross for those who were so cruelly putting Him to death. How wonderful is the love of God ! How great is the tender love of the Lord Jesus !

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOSEPH A PRISONER.

WHILE Jacob was thus deeply mourning for his darling son, Joseph was being carried down into Egypt. The poor lad's heart must have been very sore, as he thought of the cruel manner in which his brothers had treated him ; yet we never read that he had any angry feelings against them, though he knew that he had done nothing to deserve such treatment at their hands.

He must often have wondered what those wicked men would say to their father about him, and how they would account for his absence. And the thought of all that his loving father was suffering on his account, must have added to his sadness ; for Joseph's nature was one of great tenderness and affection.

At last the Ishmaelites with their captive boy, and their camels laden with spices, arrived in Egypt.

Now, Joseph was a very handsome youth ; and Potiphar, who was an officer of King Pharaoh, and Captain of the Guard, thought he would like to have him for a servant. So he bought him from

the Ishmaelites, who had carried him down into that country. And the Lord was with Joseph, so that he became a very prosperous man; and he was in the house of his master the Egyptian.

But what a change this was for him! Instead of the robe of honour—the coat of many colours—he now wore the dress of a slave. Instead of being in the position of the favourite son of a rich and powerful chief, he was now a servant in a strange land. And instead of being free to look after his father's flocks in the green valleys and on the steep slopes of beautiful Canaan—he himself a young shepherd chief—he now had to wait upon the orders of his master, and could only go where he was sent.

Yet, for all this, Joseph was more to be envied than his cruel brothers. *They* had a guilty conscience always with them, the burden of a great sin unconfessed and unforgiven; but Joseph had a mind at peace with God, and 'the Lord was with him.'

And his master *saw* that the Lord was with him, and that the Lord made all that he did to prosper in his hand. And Joseph found grace in his sight, and he served him faithfully; so Potiphar made him overseer—that is, gave him charge—over his house; and all that he had, he put into Joseph's hands.

And it came to pass from the time that he had made him overseer in his house, and over all that he had, that the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house

for Joseph's sake (just as He had blessed Laban, years before, for Jacob's sake) ; and the blessing of the Lord was upon all that he had, in the house and in the field. And Potiphar left the whole management of everything to Joseph, without even taking the trouble to look after him, for he knew that Joseph was faithful and upright.

But it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife, who was a very wicked woman, tried to make Joseph as wicked as herself. She was deceitful, and would do things behind her husband's back, that she would not do if he were near ; and she wanted Joseph to be deceitful too. But he would not listen to her ; for he feared God, and he was true to his master. Many times she tried to tempt him into sin ; but he said to her,—

‘ My master trusts me. He has given into my charge everything that is in the house, and he has been very kind to me. How then, can I deceive him ? it would be a great wickedness, and a sin against God.’

His master's wife became very angry at last, and she determined to get him into trouble and disgrace. So one day as soon as Potiphar, her husband, had come into the house, she went to him and said,—

‘ The Hebrew servant whom you have brought unto us is not as good as you think him to be. When you were out he came and was very rude to me, and mocked me ; but when I cried out, he was frightened and ran away.’

When Potiphar heard the words of his wife which she spoke to him, saying, After this manner did your servant behave to me, he was exceedingly angry. He never thought that his wicked wife was telling him what was untrue ; he believed all that she said, and so he was determined to punish Joseph. He took him, and put him into the prison which was in his house. It was a place where the king's prisoners were bound ; and he was there in the prison.

Once more, you see, Joseph was suffering from the wickedness of others. He had done nothing wrong, he had bravely done the right, yet now he was punished as a wrong-doer. He was bound with heavy chains ; and the iron chains that were round his feet hurt him very much ; and his heart was sad.*

But the Lord was with Joseph, and showed him mercy. God made the keeper of the prison to treat Joseph with kindness, so that before very long his chains were taken off, and he was allowed to walk about. Then, when the keeper of the prison saw how perfectly he was to be trusted, he gave into Joseph's care all the other prisoners that were in the prison ; and whatever they did there he was the doer of it.

The keeper of the prison saw how well Joseph managed everything, so he was quite content to leave it all in his hands ; because the Lord was with him, and that which he did, the Lord made it to prosper.

* 'The iron entered into his soul.' Ps. cv. 18 (*mar.*).

Nine long, weary years passed away, and Joseph was still a prisoner. Though he was so much trusted, yet he was not allowed to leave the prison ; he was still in disgrace—still suffering from the wicked lies of Potiphar's wicked wife.

Now it happened one day that the King of Egypt was very angry with two of his servants. I do not know what they had done to offend him, but the chief butler and the chief baker had provoked the king so much that he told Potiphar to take them away to prison. Potiphar, therefore, brought them to Joseph, and ordered them to be bound with chains, and told him to be sure and keep them safely.

You see, he trusted Joseph even yet ; and I think he must have found out that he was not as bad as he had thought him to be ; but he still kept him in prison—perhaps, because he found him so useful there.

The chief butler and the chief baker had been for some time in prison, when they both had a dream in the same night. Each of them had a different dream ; and when they awoke they could not help thinking about it, and it made them feel very miserable. When Joseph came in to them next morning, as he was always accustomed to do, to give them their food, he noticed at once that they were looking very much cast down. So he asked Pharaoh's servants, saying,—

‘Why do you look so sad to-day?’

And they said to him, ‘We have dreamed a

dream, and there is no one to tell us the meaning of it.'

And Joseph said, 'God sends dreams, and He can show what they mean ; so tell me, I pray you, what it is you have dreamed.'

And the chief butler told his dream to Joseph, and said to him, 'In my dream, behold, a vine was before me.' (You remember, vines are the plants on which grapes grow.) 'And on the vine were three branches ; and it seemed as if these branches began to bud and to blossom. Then, clusters of grapes grew on them, and the grapes were quite ripe. And Pharaoh's cup was in my hand ; and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup, and I gave the cup into the king's hand.'

This was the butler's dream. And when Joseph heard it, he knew at once what the meaning of it was ; for God gave him wisdom, and the power to explain or interpret dreams. And Joseph said to the chief butler,—

'This is the meaning of your dream. The three branches are three days. In three days Pharaoh will take you out of prison, and will let you go back to your place in the king's house. And you shall give the cup of wine into Pharaoh's hand again, as you used to do when you were his butler. But do remember me when it shall be well with you—when you are happy and prosperous—and show your kindness to me I pray you ; and tell Pharaoh about me, so that I may be taken out of this prison. For, indeed, I was stolen away out

of the land of the Hebrews ; and here also I have done nothing that they should shut me up in a place like this.'

You see, Joseph did not tell about his wicked brothers ; he merely said he was stolen away out of the land of Canaan. And he did not tell either about his master's wicked wife ; he only said, so simply, that he had done nothing to deserve being put in prison.

When the chief baker saw what a happy meaning there was to the butler's dream, he was in a great hurry to tell about his own ; and he said to Joseph,—

'In my dream, I thought that I had three white baskets on my head. In the top basket there were all manner of cakes, and of baked meats, for Pharaoh ; and the birds came and ate all the cakes and baked meats out of the basket that was on my head.'

Joseph had such a kind and tender heart, that I am sure he was grieved and sorry for the poor baker, when he told him the meaning of *his* dream ! He said,—

'The three baskets mean three days. In three days Pharaoh will take you out of prison, and will have you hung up on a tree ; and when you are dead, the birds will come and will eat your flesh off you.'

Just as Joseph had said, it all came to pass. Three days after he had explained the meaning of the dreams, it was Pharaoh's birthday ; and the

king made a great feast for all his servants. Then he sent for the chief butler and the chief baker out of prison ; and when they came before him, he forgave the butler, and said that he might wait upon him as he had done before : so the butler gave the cup again into Pharaoh's hand.

But the king would not forgive the chief baker. He ordered him to be hanged, just as Joseph had told him he would do.

Do you think the butler remembered Joseph, now that he was restored to the king's favour again ? Do you think he begged that the poor stranger who had been so unjustly shut up in prison, and who had been so kind to him there, should be set free ?

The butler was a very ungrateful man. He quite forgot poor Joseph ; he quite forgot the earnest request that he would mention Joseph to the king, and get him taken out of prison. Month after month the poor prisoner waited, hoping that some one would come to set him free ; but he waited in vain.

CHAPTER XXV.

JOSEPH A PRINCE.

GOD had not forgotten Joseph, though He chose to try his patience by keeping him so long in prison. God is so kind, and His heart is so full of love, that He never afflicts willingly—He never sends trouble without a good cause. He knows what particular training all His people require; and it is to make them more patient and more holy that He allows sorrows and trials to come upon them.

In God's own good time He prepared the way for setting the poor prisoner free; and this was how He brought it about.

Two full years had passed away since the ungrateful butler had left the prison (where Joseph had now been shut up for more than eleven years), when one night, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had a very strange dream.

He thought he was standing by the river Nile, which runs through the land of Egypt; and, behold, there came up out of the river seven very nice-looking fat cows. In that country, cattle are very fond of standing quite up to their necks in water, both because of the heat, and also to protect

themselves from the flies and insects. These cows that Pharaoh was watching in his dream began to feed in a meadow. Afterwards, he thought he saw seven other kine, or cows, come up out of the river; they were very thin and ugly, and they stood by the other cows upon the brink of the river. And the thin, ugly cows, ate up the fat, nice-looking ones.

Then Pharaoh awoke.

But he slept again, and had another strange dream. This time he thought he saw seven ears of corn come up upon one stalk,* full of good grain. And, behold, seven thin ears, all shrivelled and withered with the east wind, sprang up after them. And the seven thin ears ate up the seven good and full ears.

And Pharaoh awoke, and, behold, it was a dream.

And it came to pass in the morning that his spirit was troubled. He felt that his dreams must have a meaning, and he longed to have them explained to him. So he sent for all the wise men of Egypt, and for the men who studied secret arts, and who pretended to understand dreams; but when the king had told them his dreams, not one of them could tell him the meaning of them.

At last the butler thought of Joseph! At last he felt ashamed and sorry that he could have forgotten him for so long; and that he had not kept his promise to him. He spoke to the king, and said,—

* There is a species of wheat, largely cultivated in Egypt, which bears several ears upon one stalk.

‘I do remember my faults this day. Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and put me in prison in the house of the Captain of the Guard, both me and the chief baker. And we dreamed a dream in one night, I and he; each of us had a different dream. And there was there with us a young man, an Hebrew, servant to Potiphar, the Captain of the Guard, and we told him our dreams, and he explained to us the meaning of them. He said that I should be the king’s butler again, but that the baker would be hanged. And it all happened exactly as he had told us.’

When Pharaoh heard this, he ordered some men to go quickly and bring Joseph to him. So they went in haste and took him out of prison, where he had been so long. Then he shaved off his beard, and cut his hair short, in the way the Egyptians were accustomed to do; and he changed his garments, to make himself fit to appear before the king. Then, when he was quite ready, they brought him to Pharaoh.

And the king said to Joseph, ‘I have dreamed a dream, and there is no one to tell me what it means. But I hear that you are able to explain the meaning of dreams.’

And Joseph answered Pharaoh, saying, ‘It is not in me—I cannot do it of myself; *God* shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace.’

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, ‘In my dream, behold, I stood upon the bank of the river. And there came up out of the river seven fine fat kine ;

and they fed in a meadow. And after them came up seven very thin, poor-looking kine, worse than any I have ever seen in the land of Egypt. And the thin, ugly cows, ate up the fine fat ones. And when they had eaten them up, they were just as thin and ill-looking as they had been before. So I awoke.

‘And I had another dream, and, behold, seven ears of corn came up on one stalk, full and good. And seven other ears, thin and withered by the east wind, came up after them. And the thin ears ate up the seven good ears. These two dreams I have told to all the wise men, but no one can tell me the meaning of them.’

And Joseph said unto the king, ‘Both the dreams have the same meaning; and God has showed Pharaoh what He is going to do. The seven good kine are seven years; and the seven good ears of corn are seven years: the dream is one. And the seven thin kine, and the seven thin ears of corn, are also seven years—seven years of famine.

‘This is what God is going to do, and what He has shown to Pharaoh. There are going to be seven years of very great plenty in all the land of Egypt. But afterwards there will come seven years of famine. And all the plenty shall be forgotten in the land of Egypt, and the famine shall consume the land; for it shall be very grievous. And the reason that the dream was doubled unto Pharaoh twice, is because God will certainly bring it to pass; and He will do it soon.’

Now, before I go on with my story, I must tell you something that is very interesting and curious about the land of Egypt. Scarcely a drop of rain falls in that country. From year's end to year's end there are no heavy rains and refreshing showers, such as there are in other lands, to make the ground soft, and to make the grass green ; to refresh the flowers, and to make the corn and other seeds spring up and bear fruit.

The land of Egypt is not watered by rain, but by the great river Nile overflowing its banks, and spreading over all the flat country for many miles. Wherever the waters do not reach, the ground is quite a sandy desert, and no plants will grow. So you can understand how anxiously the people of Egypt would watch the river, and how glad they would be when they see it overflowing its banks. They dig ditches and pools, so as to catch as much of the water as possible, and to make it spread as far as possible. If the Nile did not overflow its banks, there must be a famine.

Can you think what it is that makes the water in the river rise so high, that at last it flows over its banks and spreads every way? I will tell you.

In a country called Abyssinia, far away from Egypt, a great deal of very heavy rain falls at a certain season every year. The rainy season lasts for a long time, and the violent rain pouring down into the many streams which run into the Nile soon causes it to overflow.

You may imagine how grieved the King of

Egypt was, to hear of the great distress that was coming upon his people. There had often before been famines in the land of Canaan, and in other countries, but there had always been plenty of corn in Egypt.

It was very kind of God to give him warning of what was going to happen, so that he might be prepared for it. When Joseph had finished explaining about the dreams to Pharaoh, he began to advise the king what to do. He said,—

‘Let Pharaoh look out a man who is very prudent and wise, and let him be set over the land of Egypt. And while the seven years of plenty last, let him be careful to gather up all the food of those good years that come, and save up corn for Pharaoh. So, when the seven years of famine come, there will be food for the people; and the land will not be destroyed with famine, even though no corn will be growing in the fields.’

As Pharaoh listened to Joseph, he believed every word that he spoke; and he felt sure that God’s Holy Spirit was in him. The king’s servants also believed Joseph, and they were very much pleased with what he said. And Pharaoh, said to his servants,—

‘Where can we find such a wise man as Joseph? for the Spirit of God is in him!’

And Pharaoh said unto Joseph, ‘Because God has showed you all this, I know that you are more wise and prudent than any one else. So I will set you over my house, and all my people shall be

ruled as you advise. And you shall be greater than any other man in my kingdom, except myself.'

Here was a great and wonderful change for Joseph! In the morning he was a prisoner and a slave. Before evening came, he was like a prince—honoured and trusted by the king, and made the greatest man in all that land. And Pharaoh said to Joseph,—

'See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt.'

And Pharaoh took off his ring from his hand, and put it upon Joseph's hand; and he gave him beautiful garments to wear, and he put a gold chain round his neck. He also made him to ride in a very grand chariot—one of his own carriages—and they called him the Father of the country.

And the king said to Joseph, 'I am Pharaoh, and without you shall no man lift up his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt.' By this, Pharaoh meant that he gave Joseph the power to do exactly as he liked, in all that land; and that no one was to attempt to disobey his orders.

As another mark of his favour, the king gave Joseph a wife out of one of the chief families in Egypt, so he now had a happy home in the country where he had been a slave. And all the people showed him the same respect and reverence that was due to a great prince; for King Pharaoh had made Joseph ruler over the whole land of Egypt.

Joseph was thirty years old when all these great honours were showered upon him. And as soon

as he had gone out from the presence of Pharaoh, he went through all the land of Egypt about the king's business. He did not neglect the work that was given him to do ; and as he had before been faithful and true in little things, he now showed himself to be equally upright and honest in great things.

While the seven years of plentiful harvests and abundance of food lasted, Joseph was diligent in gathering up all the spare corn over all the country. In each of the towns and cities he stored up the grain that he had collected out of the fields round those cities. And Joseph gathered corn as the sand of the sea, very much, until he left off numbering ; for it was without number.

During those years of plenty, two little sons were born to Joseph, and this was a great happiness and delight to him. He called the name of the first-born Manasseh, which means, 'Forgetting ;' 'For God,' he said, 'has made me to forget all my troubles and sorrows.'

And his second son he called Ephraim, which means 'Fruitfulness ;' for he said, 'God has greatly blessed me in the land of my affliction.'

You see, Joseph did not forget who it was that had turned his sorrow into joy. The King of Egypt had taken him out of prison, and had made him great ; but it was God who had inclined his heart to do so. The king had given him very handsome presents ; but it was God who had made him to feel so kindly towards the Hebrew slave.

The Bible tells us that every good gift, and everything that makes life sweet and happy to us, come down from our Father in heaven. He delights to see His people thankful and glad for the blessings He sends them, for He takes pleasure in the prosperity or success of His servants. And there is another sweet verse in the Bible which says,—

‘The Lord taketh pleasure *in them that fear Him*: in those that hope in His mercy.’

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE UNKNOWN BROTHER.

THE seven years of great plenty were at an end, and the seven years of famine began to come, just as Joseph had said. The dearth, or scarceness of food, was not in the land of Egypt only, but in all the surrounding countries also; yet it was only in Egypt that there was corn for making bread.

Who had charge of the corn?

It was Joseph who had the care of all the storehouses in which the grain was kept; for you remember how, for seven years, he had gone through all the land collecting corn, and storing it safely away till the days of famine should come.

And now the famine *had* come, and the people had nothing to eat, so they went to Pharaoh, and cried to him for bread—they told him they were starving. And Pharaoh said to all the people of Egypt,—

‘Go to Joseph, and whatever he says to you, do.’

Then the people took their money to Joseph, and he opened the storehouses, and sold corn to all the Egyptians. And the famine was very grievous. People also came from other countries to buy corn, because the famine was so sore.

What do you think was happening in the land of Canaan all this time—in the land where Jacob lived? The famine was there too; and the sons of Jacob were in great distress about it. They did not know what to do, or where they should go for food; and they were afraid that their wives and their little children would all be starved to death. But Jacob said to his sons one day,—

‘Why do you look one upon another? Why do you stand still doing nothing? Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt! Get you down to that country, and buy food for us, that we may live, and not die.’

So it was decided that Joseph’s ten brothers should go down to Egypt to buy corn. But Jacob would not let Benjamin, his youngest son, go down with them, for he said,—

‘Perhaps some harm might befall him.’

It almost seems as if the poor sorrowing father had some suspicion that his sons were not altogether blameless about his darling Joseph’s disappearance; and that that was the reason why he was afraid to trust Benjamin with them.

The sons of Israel came down, amongst many others, to buy corn; for the famine was in all the land of Canaan, and numbers of people were going down at the same time, to buy food. When his brothers arrived before Joseph, they did not know him. They never once thought or suspected that this was the brother they had sold, more than twenty years before, for twenty pieces of silver.

He was only a young lad then. *Now* they saw before them a very handsome man, with his hair cut and arranged in the peculiar way that the Egyptians were accustomed to wear it. He was also dressed like an Egyptian, and he was called by another name, which the king had given him, to make the people forget that he had come from another country, and was not really an Egyptian. Besides all this, he was the lord of the land ; so no wonder they did not recognise him !

But Joseph knew *them* in a moment ! Yet he would not tell them who he was, for he wanted to prove them, and to see whether they were better men than they were when *he* was at home with them. So when his ten brothers bowed down very humbly before him, with their faces to the earth, he spoke roughly to them, and said,—

‘Where do you come from ?’

And they answered, ‘From the land of Canaan, to buy food.’

As Joseph saw them bowing down before him, he remembered the dream which he had dreamed as a boy, and how angry they were with him when he told them about it. Do you remember how he thought that they were all binding sheaves in the field, and that his sheaf stood upright, while theirs bowed down to his sheaf ? Now the dream had come true. But Joseph still went on speaking roughly to them, and pretending not to know them. He said,—

‘You are spies ; you have come from our

enemies to see how poor the land is, and what harm you can do us.'

And they said unto him, 'Nay, my lord, but to buy food are your servants come. We are all the sons of one man; we are true men: your servants are no spies.'



Joseph pretended not to believe them. He said, 'Nay, but you are come to see how poor and starved the land is.'

Then the ten brothers thought that if they were to tell this great lord who they were, he would be more likely to believe them. So they said,—

'Your servants are twelve brethren: the sons

of one man in the land of Canaan ; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.'

And Joseph said unto them, 'Now I shall see whether you are spies, or if you are true men. By the life of Pharaoh you shall not go away from here, except your youngest brother come down. Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother ; and all the rest of you shall be kept in prison till he comes. By this I shall know whether you are speaking the truth, or whether you are spies.'

When Joseph had said this, he ordered them all to be taken to prison ; and he kept them there for three days.

Do you think Joseph was angry with them, because he treated them like this ? Do you think he was paying them out—returning evil for evil—by punishing them now they were in his power ?

No ; he had not any angry feelings in his heart. He loved them in spite of all their unkindness to himself. But he was anxious to know if his dear brother Benjamin were safe. Not seeing him with them, he wondered if their story was really true, when they said he was with their father at home ; or whether they had treated Benjamin as cruelly as they had treated *him*. He wished to find out if their hearts were changed, or if they were jealous of their father's love for his dear Rachel's youngest son ; and he took this way to prove them.

On the third day, Joseph had his ten brothers brought before him, and he said to them, 'This is

what you must do, and then you shall live ; for I fear God. If you are true men, then let one of your brethren be bound in the prison ; and all the rest may go back to your country, and carry corn for the famine of your houses. But bring your youngest brother unto me ; so shall your words be proved to be true, and you shall not die.'

When the men heard this, they were greatly distressed. They could not bear the thought of leaving one of their number behind, in an Egyptian prison, while they returned to Canaan ; and, besides this, they doubted very much if they would be able to persuade their father to let them bring Benjamin down. And now, in their trouble and sorrow, they remembered again the wicked deed they had done, more than twenty years before, and they said one to another,—

'We are indeed guilty about our brother Joseph, because we saw the anguish of his soul—his exceeding grief and fear—when he begged us to spare him ; and we would not hear. It is because of what we did then, that all this distress is come upon us now.'

And Reuben answered them, saying, 'Did I not speak to you, saying, Do not sin against the child ; and you would not hear ? And now God is punishing us for it.'

The brothers did not know that Joseph could understand them ; for they had been speaking in Hebrew, and he had been speaking to them in the language of Egypt, and had made a man,

called an interpreter, explain to them what he had said. But when he heard their words—when he heard them speak in the familiar language of his dear old home—and when he found that they were sorry for their wickedness, his heart was so much touched that he could not keep back his tears. He turned away from them and wept.

He did not wish to make them unhappy, but he was determined to find out if Benjamin were safe. So presently he went back to them again, and talked with them a little. Then he took Simeon from them, and bound him before their eyes.

Why did he fix upon Simeon as the one to be kept in prison? I think he would not take Reuben, because he was the only one of them all who did not wish the boy Joseph to be unkindly treated. And he did not take Judah, because, though he had been very hard-hearted, yet he begged that the lad might be sold, instead of being killed. And I think he took Simeon, because he was the most fierce and cruel of them all.

Before the brothers set out on their homeward way again, Joseph told some of his servants to fill their sacks with corn; and, secretly, to put back into each man's sack, the money which each of them had brought to pay for the corn. He also gave them plenty of food to eat while on their journey. Thus did he unto them.

Then the men put their sacks upon their asses, and departed.

It was with very heavy hearts that they jour-

neyed back to Canaan again. They had bad news to take to their poor old father ; and they had already saddened his life so much, that it was a great distress to them to think that the tidings they would bring would cause him more sorrow.

As they journeyed on they came to an inn, and there they stopped for a time to rest. And as one of them opened his sack to give food to his ass, to his great surprise he saw his money there ! for it was in the sack, lying on the top of the corn. He said to his brothers,—

‘My money is given back ; and lo, it is even in my sack !’

And they were greatly afraid, saying one to another, ‘What is this that God has done unto us ?’

At last they came unto Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, and told him all that had happened to them ; saying, ‘The man who is the lord of the land spoke very roughly to us, and took us for spies of the country. And we said unto him, We are true men ; we are no spies. We be twelve brethren, sons of our father ; one is not, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.

‘And the man, the lord of the country, said unto us, This is the way that I shall know that you are true men ; leave one of your brethren here with me, and take food for the famine of your households, and be gone. And bring your youngest brother unto me ; then I shall know that you are no spies, but that you are true men. So will I

give your brother back to you again, and you shall buy and sell in the land.'

These were very grievous tidings for poor old Jacob. Simeon was a prisoner in Egypt; and he would not be set free till Benjamin should be sent down. How his heart must have sunk while he listened to his sons' story!

When they had finished telling him everything they began to empty their sacks, and to put away the corn which was so scarce, and so precious, into some safe place. And, behold, every man's bundle of money was in his sack! and when they saw it, both they and their father were very much afraid. And Jacob their father said unto them,—

'You have bereaved'—or, deprived—'me of my children. Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and you will take Benjamin away. All these things are against me—they distress me greatly.'

It was quite evident that Jacob distrusted his sons; for he complained of them, and laid at *their* door the disappearance of Joseph, for whom he had never ceased to mourn.

Then Reuben spake unto his father, saying, 'Kill my two sons, if I do not bring Benjamin back to you safely. Deliver him into my hands, and I will bring him back to you again.'

Reuben could *speak* bravely, and he could make grand offers; but he could not *act* bravely. Did he really believe that to kill his two sons would be any comfort to his gentle father, if any harm were to happen to Benjamin?

Oh, no. Jacob knew that no dependence could be placed on his eldest son. He knew that he was changeable, that he could easily be led into wrongdoing, and that he was never brave to do the right if it brought him into any difficulty or danger. His father had *proved* that he could not be trusted, and so he replied very decidedly.

‘My son shall not go down with you,’ he said; ‘for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If mischief befall him by the way in which you go, then you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.’

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FEAST IN EGYPT.

IN a time of such terrible dearth and scarceness as I have described to you, it is certain that the greatest care was always taken that there should never be the smallest waste of precious food. The famine was still sore in the land of Canaan, as well as in Egypt and in many other countries; and with all their care, the corn that Joseph's brothers had brought out of Egypt could not last long.

After a time it was all eaten up, and they were in danger of starving again, unless they could go down to Egypt to buy more. But they knew it was useless to go unless they might take Benjamin with them. At last their father Jacob said to them,—

‘Go again, buy us a little food.’

And Judah spake unto his father, saying, ‘The man did very solemnly declare to us that we should not see his face except our brother be with us. If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy food for you. But if you will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said unto us, You shall not see my face except your brother be with you.’

And Israel said, 'Why did you deal so ill with me? why were you so unkind as to tell the man that you had another brother?'

And his sons answered, 'The man asked us a great many questions, and he made a great many inquiries about our family. He said, Is your father yet alive? Have you another brother? And we told him all he wanted to know. How could we suppose that he would say, Bring your brother down?'

And Judah said unto Israel his father, 'Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. I will take care of him: of my hand shall you require him. If I do not bring him back to you safely, and set him before you, then let me bear the blame for ever. Let us go quickly, for if we had not lingered so much we might have returned home again by this time.'

Do you think his father would trust Benjamin to Judah? He would not trust his first-born, Reuben. Do you think he had more confidence in his *fourth* son?

Yes; he had. Much as he dreaded to part from his beloved Benjamin, he felt sure that Judah would guard him with the firmness and courage of a lion. Judah did not make a foolish offer as Reuben did; he very simply said, 'Let me bear the blame for ever if I do not bring him safely back again.' And his father knew that his simple word could be relied on. So their father Israel said unto them,—

'If it must be so now—if Benjamin must go—do this. Take some of the best fruits of the land, and carry down a present to the man. Take a little balm, and a little honey, spices and myrrh, nuts and almonds. And take double money in your hand, and the money that you found in your sacks, take it all back again ; perhaps it was by some mistake—some oversight—that it was returned. Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man. And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send away your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.' That means, If I am to lose them, I must lose them!

Now I must explain to you, that though Benjamin was called a lad by his father and brothers, because he was the youngest, yet he really was a grown-up man, with a wife and a great many sons of his own. But he was just as obedient to his father's wishes as if he were still a child ; and he did not attempt to take that journey into Egypt till his father had given his consent.

Poor Jacob's heart was very full of sadness and fear that day, when he parted from his beloved son. Most earnestly he longed for his safety! and he did the very best thing of all to *keep* him safe—he prayed to God for him. He prayed also for Simeon ; that they both might be restored to him again.

As soon as their father had given his sons permission to take Benjamin with them, they made haste to get all in readiness for their journey.

There were the sweet gums—the balm and the myrrh—to be packed up ; the honey also, and the spices, and nuts and almonds. For, though these things were in plenty in Canaan, they were very scarce in the land of Egypt, and that was why they were taking all these nice fruits as a present for the lord of Egypt.

Then they took double money in their hand, as their father had desired them to do, and they put upon their asses the empty sacks for bringing back the corn. There must have been a great number of asses to carry corn enough to last them for a whole year ; for Jacob's family was nearly seventy persons in number, besides a great many servants.

At last they were all ready to start. They took Benjamin, and kissed their father, and their wives and little children, and bidding them all good-bye, they went down into Egypt.

Once again they stood before Joseph. They went as before to the place where he was selling the corn ; and when Joseph saw that Benjamin was with them, his heart went out in great love to his young brother, and he longed to put his arms round his neck. But he would not speak to any of them yet ; he wanted to prove his brothers still further. Besides, this was the time for serving out the corn to the people, and as Joseph was always faithful in doing his duty, and attending to his business, he still went on with his work, and would not leave off till noon—that is twelve o'clock—when he would go home to dinner.

But Joseph spoke to his chief servant or steward, who managed his house, and said to him, 'Bring these men home, and make a feast for them; for they shall dine with me to-day.'

And the steward did as Joseph commanded him, and he brought the men into Joseph's house.

Do you think they were pleased at being taken into that grand house? No; they were very much afraid. When they remembered how roughly the lord of Egypt had spoken to them before, and when they remembered that their brother Simeon was still shut up in prison, they could not feel safe, or at their ease. They said to each other,—

'Because of the money that was returned in our sacks at the first time are we brought in here. It was put there on purpose, that the man might find an excuse for taking away our asses, and for making us his slaves.'

They were so frightened and unhappy about it, that they came near to the steward of Joseph's house, and they talked with him at the door of the house. They thought that if they told him what trouble they were in, he would, perhaps, be their friend; so they said to him,—

'O Sir, we came indeed down at the first time to buy food. And as we were returning home, it came to pass when we came to the inn that we opened our sacks, and behold, every man's money was in the mouth of his sack—our money in full weight; and we have brought it again in our hand. And other money have we brought down in our

hands to buy food. We cannot tell who put our money in our sacks.'

And the man said to Joseph's brothers, 'Peace be to you: fear not. Your God, and the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks. I had your money.'

The brothers were much comforted at hearing the steward's kind words. Then the steward went away from them for a short time. He went to fetch Simeon out of prison; and when he brought him back to them, he told them that they were all to dine with his master that day. How they must have wondered what it was that had made the lord of Egypt so kind to them this time!

Then Joseph's servant gave the brothers water for washing their feet, treating them like honoured guests; and he gave food to all their asses. And while they were waiting for Joseph to come home, the men got ready the present that they had brought for him out of Canaan.

Joseph came at last; and when they saw him, they brought him the present which was in their hand into the house, and bowed themselves to him to the earth. And Joseph spoke kindly to them, and asked them how they were, and said,—

'Is your father well—the old man of whom you spoke? Is he yet alive?'

And they answered, 'Your servant our father is in good health: he is yet alive.' And they bowed down their heads again, in sign of deep respect.

.. And he lifted up his eyes, and saw his brother

Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, 'Is this your youngest brother of whom you told me?'

Joseph's heart was almost bursting with longing to embrace him, but he would not make himself known to them yet. However, he could not refrain from blessing Benjamin, for he loved him so much. He said,—

'God be gracious to you, my son.'

When Joseph said that, he was obliged to hurry quickly out of the room ; for the sight of his dear young brother made such tender feelings come into his heart that the tears sprang to his eyes. He wanted some quiet place where he could cry by himself without being seen ; so he entered into his chamber, and wept there.

In a little while he washed his face, that no one might see he had been crying ; and then he went back to his brothers again. He made a great effort not to give way to tears any more, but to be cheerful ; and he ordered his servants to get the dinner ready.

'Set on bread,' he said.

So the servants spread the feast. Joseph sat at a table by himself, as he was always accustomed to do. And the Egyptians who were with him sat at another table by themselves ; for they would have thought it a dreadful thing to eat bread at the same table at which a Hebrew was sitting—even though he was the governor over all that land.

At a third table Joseph's brothers were placed. Joseph made them all sit down in proper order

before him. The first-born, Reuben, first; then Simeon; next to him Levi; and all the others according to their ages; and Benjamin last of all. The men wondered how it was that this lord of Egypt could tell about their ages; for some of them were born so nearly at the same time, that it would have been almost impossible for a stranger to have found out which were the oldest. Ah, they little thought how perfectly well he knew them all!

It was a happy party in that room that day. Joseph's brothers had lost all their fear of the ruler of the land, when they found how kind he was to them. And they enjoyed the feast, too. For remember, this was a time of grievous famine, and they had often of late not had even enough to eat; and it had been a very long time since they had seen such plenty, and had sat down to such a feast as this.

It is often the custom in Eastern countries for the giver of a feast to send some of the nicest dishes, which are before himself, to the guest whom he wishes most to honour, or of whom he is most fond; and sometimes he chooses some dainty morsels out of the dishes, to put upon his friend's plate. Just in this way, Joseph sent nice things from his table to his brothers. But to Benjamin he sent five times as much as to any of the others. He showed plainly that Benjamin was his favourite—were the others jealous of him?

No, they were not. They seem to have im-

proved very much since those sad days when they consulted together about killing their young brother—their father's favourite. It did not at all displease them that the lord of Egypt should like Benjamin best; so they ate and drank, and were merry with him.

As Joseph watched them, he must have seen that they were not jealous of Benjamin's larger portion, as they had been, years before, of his own coat of many colours. But he was going to try them once again before he would tell them who he was.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JUDAH IS TRUE TO HIS TRUST.

THE day after that feast in Joseph's house the eleven brothers were to return home. But before they left, Joseph commanded his steward who had the charge of his house, saying,—

'Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry; and put every man's money in his sack again. And put my cup—the silver cup out of which I always drink—in the sack of the youngest, and his corn money also.'

And the steward did everything exactly as he had been told.

Can you guess why Joseph had ordered his silver cup to be put in Benjamin's sack? He wanted to find out if the brothers would take Benjamin's part when they should see him in trouble and difficulty. He also wanted to see if their hearts were as hard and unfeeling towards his dear old father as they were when they sold him to the Ishmaelites, and so caused him a ceaseless sorrow.

As soon as the morning was light the men were sent away, with all their asses laden with

corn. No doubt they felt very thankful and happy at being on their homeward way again, with all their number complete—Simeon restored to them, and not one left behind this time. They knew nothing about the silver cup, nor what a terrible heartache it would soon cause them.

When they were gone out of the city, and were not yet far off, Joseph said to his steward,—

‘Go quickly after the men, and when you have overtaken them say unto them, Why have you returned evil for good? Why have you stolen my master’s cup? It is very wrong of you to have done this.’

So the steward ran after Joseph’s brothers, and very soon came up with them. Then he spoke to them, just as Joseph had desired him to do, and said,—

‘Why have you stolen my master’s silver cup, out of which he drinks every day, and for which he was certain to inquire very particularly? Why have you returned evil for all his kindness to you?’

The brothers were greatly distressed to think that Joseph could have supposed they would have acted so ungratefully and wickedly. They knew they were innocent, and so they said,—

‘Why does my lord say such words? God forbid that your servants should do such a thing! You remember, that when we found the money returned in our sacks we brought it again to you out of the land of Canaan; so do you think we should steal out of your lord’s house either silver or

gold? If you can find the silver cup with any one of us, then let that person die; and all the rest of us will be slaves to my lord.'

And the steward answered, 'No, you shall not all be slaves; only he with whom the cup is found shall be my servant. But the rest of you shall be blameless, and you may return home in peace.'

The brothers felt so sure that no cup would be found amongst their things, that as quickly as possible they untied their sacks, and put them on the ground and opened them. And the steward began to search in every sack. He examined Reuben's first, and all the others afterwards in regular order; till last of all he looked in Benjamin's sack, and there the cup was found.

It was a terrible shock to all the brothers; a bitter sorrow and a sad surprise. I am sure they did not think that Benjamin had stolen it—they knew him too well for that; but how did the cup get into his sack? *We* know; but *they* did not.

The brothers did not know what to say. They tore their clothes in sign of great sorrow; then they put their sacks on the asses again, and returned to the city.

The steward said they might all go home except Benjamin, but they would not leave their young brother; they remembered too keenly their cruel treatment of Joseph, and they felt sure that God was punishing them for their wickedness. They felt, too, that they could not go back to their father without Benjamin, for they would not be

able to endure to see his grief. Their conscience was never at rest as they remembered how much bitter sorrow they had already caused him.

So Judah and his brethren came to Joseph's house, for he was still there; and they fell before him on the ground. And Joseph said unto them,—

‘What thing is this that you have done? Did you not know that I should be certain to find out your wickedness?’

Then Judah spoke. You remember it was he who had promised his father to take care of Benjamin, and to bring him back safely or else to bear the blame for ever. So now he sorrowfully answered,—

‘What shall we say unto my lord? What shall we speak? or how shall we clear ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants. He is punishing us for our sins. Behold, we have come back to be your slaves; both we and he also with whom the cup is found.’

And Joseph said, ‘God forbid that I should do so; but the man in whose sack the cup was found, he shall be my servant; and as for you, go back in peace unto your father.’

Now can you see and understand a little how Joseph was proving them? If the brothers disliked Benjamin, or were jealous of their father's love for him, they would be quite content to leave him as a slave in Egypt. Hatred and jealousy made them sell Joseph to be a slave; now he

would find out if they had the same unkind feelings towards his young brother.

But once again Judah spoke. He came near unto Joseph, and said,—

‘Oh, my lord, let your servant, I pray you, speak a word in my lord’s ears, and do not be angry with your servant; for you are as great a man as King Pharaoh himself. My lord asked his servants, saying, Have you a father or a brother? And we said unto my lord, We have a father, an old man, and a child of his old age, a little one. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother, and his father loves him very much.

‘And you said unto your servants, Bring him down unto me, that I may set mine eyes upon him. And we said unto my lord, The lad cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die. And you said unto your servants, Except your youngest brother come down with you, you shall see my face no more.

‘And it came to pass when we returned to Canaan, we told unto your servant, my father, all the words of my lord.

‘And, after many months, our father said, Go again and buy us a little food. And we said, We cannot go down. If our youngest brother be with us, then we will go down, for we may not see the man’s face except our youngest brother be with us.’

‘And your servant, my father, said unto us, You know that my wife Rachel bare me two sons,

and the one went away from me, and I said, Surely he is torn in pieces, and I have not seen him since. And if you take Benjamin from me also, and mischief befall him, you will bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave.

‘Now, therefore, when I come to your servant, my father, and the lad be not with us, seeing that his life is bound up in the lad’s life, it shall come to pass when he sees that the lad is not with us, that he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant, our father, with sorrow to the grave.

‘For your servant became surety for the lad—I made myself answerable for him—with my father, saying, If I do not bring him back unto you, then I shall bear the blame to my father for ever.’

How earnestly Joseph must have listened to every word of this touching story, which Judah told so simply and so truthfully! His heart must have throbbed both with pleasure and pain, as he listened to Judah’s account of all that had passed in his own old home in Canaan; with pleasure, as he saw that his brothers did really care now for their father and for Benjamin, and with pain as he heard how his father had mourned for him.

But Judah had not yet finished all he had to say. He had a request to make, a favour to ask, and what do you think that was? He wished Joseph to take him as a slave instead of Benjamin. He said,—

‘Now, therefore, I pray you, let me remain here

and be a bondman (or slave) to my lord, instead of the lad, and let the lad go home again with his brothers. For how could I go up to my father if the lad be not with me? I could not bear to see his great sorrow, for I think he would die of grief.'

Ah, Judah had quite redeemed his character now; he had, indeed, altered for the better! Once he had proposed to sell a brother into slavery, but now, rather than let his brother Benjamin be a slave, and rather than give his father the grief of losing him, he willingly offers to be a slave in his stead! He gave himself to save his brother!

Was not this Christ-like?

At Judah's words Joseph could no longer refrain himself before all those who stood by him, for many people were in the room besides Joseph's brothers. He cried out,—

'Let every one go out of the room.'

So all the Egyptians left the room, and no one was there when Joseph made himself known to his brethren. He had yearned over them with exceeding tenderness, even while he was appearing to treat them harshly, yet it was but to try whether they were really sorry for the sins of former years. It was not because he was angry with them that he spoke roughly, and made himself strange to them; he only wanted to be assured that their hearts were softer now than they were then.

But the moment he saw that they did really repent, and that they would suffer pain, and toil, and slavery themselves, to spare a brother pain, and

to dry a father's tear—that moment all his love and tenderness burst forth. He could not hide himself from them any longer, for his whole heart was full of love.

There are many things in this story of Joseph which remind us of the Lord Jesus. Just as Joseph felt a yearning love for the brothers who had treated him so cruelly, so does our blessed Master yearn over poor foolish sinners who hate and reject Him; and over little children who grieve and disobey Him.

He cannot help loving them. He cannot help trying to win them back, and to make them repent of their wrong-doing. While they are impenitent and hardened He hides His face from them for a time; and sometimes He sends trouble and sadness. It is not that He likes to see people unhappy—oh, no, not that—but because He knows that they can never be really happy till they are really sorry for sin.

Then, when they *do* repent and confess their sins, He pardons them at once, and puts sweet peace in their hearts; and the angels of God rejoice and are glad.

The heart of Jesus is more tender and loving than any human heart that ever beat. Should we not pray very earnestly that we may be kept from grieving Him?

CHAPTER XXIX.

GOOD NEWS FROM A FAR COUNTRY.

JOSEPH could not keep back his tears when he made himself known to his brethren. He wept aloud ; so loud that all the Egyptians who were in the house heard him. And Joseph said to his brothers,—

‘ I am Joseph ; does my father yet live ? ’

And his brethren could not answer him, for they were terrified at his presence.

He saw how much afraid they were, and that because of their great surprise and fear they had not a word to say ; so he spoke to them most lovingly.

‘ Come near to me, I pray you,’ he said.

And they came near. Then he said to them,—

‘ I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Now, therefore, be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves that you sold me ; for it was God’s doing. *He* sent me before you to preserve life, that people should not die of starvation. For these two years has the famine been in the land, and yet there are five more years to come, during which there shall be no ploughing nor harvest, for

no corn will grow. And God sent me before you to save food, that your lives might be saved by a great deliverance.

‘So now it was not you that sent me here, but God; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

‘Make haste and go up to my father, and say unto him, Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down unto me, do not delay. And you shall dwell in the land of Goshen; and you shall be near unto me, you and your children, and your children’s children, and your flocks and your herds, and all that you have. And I will take care of you there, and will feed you, lest you and your household and all that you have become very poor; for there are yet five years more of famine.

‘And behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin, that it is my mouth that is speaking to you. And you shall tell my father of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that you have seen; and you shall make haste and bring my father down here.’

When Joseph had spoken these tender, comforting words, he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover, he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. And after that his brethren talked with him.

How ashamed they must have felt of all their

former jealousy and wickedness; and how they must have wondered at receiving so much kindness from one they had injured so much! But now they could not help loving him; for such gentleness and complete forgiveness as he had shown them, had at last quite won their hearts.

The tidings of all that was happening in Joseph's house very soon reached the ears of King Pharaoh. His servants told him,—

‘Joseph's brethren are come.’

And it pleased Pharaoh well, and his servants also. And Pharaoh said unto Joseph,—

‘Say unto your brothers, This do ye; put your sacks of corn on your asses, and go, get you into the land of Canaan. And take your father and your households and come unto me; and I will give you the good of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land. And I will do more for you than this; for I will give you waggons, that you may take them out of the land of Egypt to fetch your little ones, and your wives and your father also. Do not care about leaving some of your property behind, for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours.’ •

You see how kind the king was to Joseph, and to all his family for his sake.

Then Joseph gave waggons to the children of Israel, as Pharaoh had commanded; and he also gave them food, for themselves and for their asses for the journey.

Joseph gave them presents also. To each of

his brothers he gave a complete change of raiment. But to Benjamin, his dear young brother—who was his own mother's son, and who had never injured him by thought or deed—to him he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five changes of raiment. And to his father he sent a great many things; namely, ten asses laden with the good things of Egypt, and ten asses laden with corn and bread and meat for his father by the way—that is, when he should be coming down from Canaan into Egypt.

After this Joseph sent his brethren away, and they departed. But before they left he gave them one little word of warning,—

‘See that you do not quarrel—that you fall not out—by the way.’

He was afraid that perhaps unkind words might pass between them. They might begin to blame one another for what they had done to him when he was a lad. He had forgiven it all; and now he only desired that they should not blame each other, but that they should henceforth live in peace.

Do you remember that the Lord Jesus Christ gave the same command to His disciples? The same night that He was betrayed, when He was talking to them after supper, He said, ‘A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another: as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.’

When children fight, or quarrel with one an-

other, or say unkind words to each other, they are not behaving like the disciples of Christ. If they wish to please Him, they must always be gentle and loving and forgiving.

Once more the sons of Jacob are on their way from the land of Egypt to return to their father's house. A strange joy and thankfulness are in their hearts; for Joseph is not dead nor pining away in cruel slavery, and they have glad tidings to take back to their, patient, sorrowful father. We may be sure they made all the haste they could, and journeyed as fast as they were able to go, till they came into the land of Canaan and reached their father's house. Then they said to him,—

‘Joseph is yet alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt!’

And the heart of Jacob fainted. The sudden news brought him no comfort, but only revived again more keenly the memory of his great loss; for he did not believe what his sons said.

Then they told him all the words of Joseph, and gave him all the loving messages he had sent. And when Jacob saw the waggons which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. And Israel said,—

‘It is enough; I believe it now; Joseph, my son, is yet alive. I will go and see him before I die.’

CHAPTER XXX.

A HOME IN EGYPT.

IT was the sight of those strange Egyptian waggons that first made Jacob believe the joyful tidings, brought to him by his sons. It is supposed that waggons and carriages were not known in Canaan in those days ; so we may imagine with what great interest the aged patriarch would look at them, and how deeply he would feel the thoughtful kindness of the Egyptian king and his own dear son, in sending them for his comfort on his journey.

You remember, Jacob was very lame ; and he was old, too. He could not, therefore, have made the journey on foot, as his sons had done. Had it not been for the waggons which were sent to carry him, I suppose he would never have attempted to go down into Egypt, greatly as he longed to see his darling son again.

But now the way had been made easy for him ; and he was much too eager to clasp Joseph in his arms to make any delay in setting out on his journey. He and his sons made every preparation for their departure as quickly as possible, and then—taking everything that belonged to them—they

left the vale of Hebron where they had lived for so many years.

They had not gone very far when they came to Beer-sheba, which was on their way to Egypt. Here it was that Jacob's father and mother, Isaac and Rebekah, had lived so long ; and Israel rested here that night, and offered sacrifice unto the God of his father Isaac. I dare say the same altar was still standing, on which Abraham and Isaac had often offered sacrifices in former years ; and Jacob would surely remember, as he now worshipped there himself in his old age, how wonderfully God had prospered and blessed him, and how He had given to him all those glorious promises made to Abraham his grandfather.

And God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ' Jacob ! Jacob ! '

And he answered, ' Here am I. '

And He said, ' I am God, the God of your father. Fear not to go down into Egypt, for I will there make of you a great nation. I will go down with you into Egypt ; and I will also surely bring you up again. And Joseph shall put his hands upon your eyes. '

How kind and gracious of God to comfort Jacob's heart by giving him the blessed assurance of His presence with him, and His watchful care over him ! It must have given him fresh courage, and made him strong to bear the fatigue of his long and wearying journey.

Then Jacob rose up from Beer-sheba. And the

sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the waggons which Pharaoh had sent to carry them. And they took their cattle, and their goods which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt; Jacob and all his family with him. It was a large party—nearly seventy persons—for there were his sons, and his sons' sons with him, and his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his household.

So they came at last into Egypt.

Goshen was the name of the place to which they had come, and where Joseph had said that their home was to be. As soon, therefore, as they had arrived, Jacob sent Judah to Joseph to tell him they were come.

Directly Joseph had heard the good news, he ordered his chariot to be got ready at once, for he was in great haste to see his dear old father, who had always been so loving and kind to him, from the time he was an infant, till he had grown to be a big lad of seventeen years. What a long time ago that was, and how greatly they would find each other altered now!

It was not long before Joseph reached the land of Goshen where his father was, and presented himself before him. And Joseph fell on his father's neck and kissed him; and he wept on his neck a good while.

And Israel said unto Joseph, 'Now let me die, since I have seen your face. I am content not to live any longer, because you are yet alive.'

That was a wonderfully happy meeting. The father and son who had loved one another so tenderly, and who had been so cruelly separated, were now brought together again, by God's goodness and mercy. We may be quite sure that neither Joseph nor his father forgot to thank God for all His great goodness to them; and for having brought so much good out of evil.

There is a verse in the Bible which says, 'All things work together for good to them that love God : ' and His children always find it so.

Now, Joseph had to be very careful not to make the Egyptians jealous or angry, by his bringing down such a large number of his family into their famine-stricken country.. He knew the king would welcome them ; but he feared the people might not be pleased. So Joseph said unto his brethren, and to all his father's house,—

'I will go to Pharaoh, and will speak unto him and say, My brethren and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me. And the men are shepherds, for it has always been their business to take care of cattle; and they have brought their flocks and their herds, and all that they have.'

Then Joseph explained to his brothers that the Egyptians did not like shepherds at all. They were partly afraid of them for one reason; for some warlike shepherds had once come into their country, and had fought against them, and burned their cities, killing the men, and taking the women and

children to be slaves. Besides this, the Egyptians had a great dislike to, and contempt for, people who lived in tents, and who led a wandering life. For, you know, most of the shepherds in that part of the world were obliged to wander about from place to place, to find pasture-land enough to feed their cattle.

And Joseph said to his brethren, 'Pharaoh is sure to call for you; and it shall come to pass when he shall ask, What is your occupation? that you shall say, Your servants' trade (or business) has been about cattle, from our youth even until now, both we and also our fathers. Then he will let you dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.'

Now there were rich pasture-lands in Goshen, just suited for the feeding of cattle.

Then Joseph got into his chariot again, and returned to the city where he and the king lived. And he came and told Pharaoh, and said,—

'My father, and my brethren, and their flocks and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen.'

And King Pharaoh wished to see some of Joseph's brothers; so Joseph took five of them and presented them unto Pharaoh. We do not know the names of those who were presented to the king, but I have no doubt that Benjamin was one of them. And Pharaoh said to them,—

'What is your occupation?'

And they answered him as Joseph had told them to do. They said, 'Your servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers.'

They said, moreover, unto Pharaoh, 'For to sojourn,' or to dwell, 'in the land are we come; for your servants have no pasture for their flocks, for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, we pray you, let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.'

King Pharaoh gave a very kind answer to their request; but he spoke to Joseph, and not to his brothers. Most likely he did this because Joseph knew the language of Egypt, and his brothers did not. So Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying,—

'Your father and your brethren are come unto you; the land of Egypt is before you; in the best of the land make your father and your brethren to dwell. In the land of Goshen let them dwell; and if you know that some of them are active, industrious men, then make them rulers over my cattle.'

After this, Joseph brought in Jacob, his father, and set him before Pharaoh. I dare say he had often spoken to the king about his dear old father, the patriarch and shepherd-chief who was so much honoured and respected even by the godless idol-worshippers in Canaan. And now, when Israel, halting upon his thigh (or walking lame, as we say), was brought into the king's presence, he lifted up his hands and blessed the king; for he could not forget what great kindness his darling son had received at his hands.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, 'How old are you?'

And Jacob answered and said unto the king, 'The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years. Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been. I have had much trouble and sorrow, and I have not lived as long as my fathers have done; they were much older than I am, when they ended the years of their pilgrimage.'

Do you know what a pilgrimage is? It is a journey to a holy place.

What then do you think Jacob meant, when he spoke of the years of his pilgrimage being a hundred and thirty years?

He meant that he did not look upon any place on earth as his home, but that he was on a journey—travelling to a heavenly home. You remember that when he was young, he always desired much more earnestly spiritual than temporal or earthly blessings. In the same way, all his life long he desired more earnestly a heavenly than an earthly home.

So all his life was a pilgrimage! a journey to a holy place. And God knew it, and that was why He loved Abraham and Isaac and Jacob so much, and was not ashamed to be called their God. For they were all pilgrims and strangers on the earth; and though they praised and thanked God for all the prosperity and riches He had given them, yet they were longing for the time when they might be with Him in their *real* home in heaven.

When Jacob had spoken to the king, and told him in those few sad words how full of trial and grief his life had been, he blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence.

And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, even in Goshen, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph took care of his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household ; and he gave them bread enough for all their families, and for their little ones.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLESSING OF JOSEPH'S TWO SONS.

THE seven years' grievous famine was still raging in all those countries of which I have been telling you. There was no ploughing of the ground, and no gathering in of harvests ; for neither corn nor grain of any kind would grow. And because there was no bread there was very great distress in the land of Egypt, and in all the land of Canaan.

But, happily, those large storehouses, which Joseph had filled with corn, were not yet empty. So the people brought their money to Joseph to buy corn ; and all the money he collected in this way he took into Pharaoh's house.

At last the money was all gone. The people of Egypt and Canaan had parted with all they had, and it seemed as if they must, at last, die of starvation. Then the Egyptians came unto Joseph and said,—

'Give us bread ; for why should we die in your presence ? Our money is all gone.'

And Joseph said unto them, 'Bring your cattle to me, and I will give you food in exchange for your cattle, as you have no more money.'

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And they brought their cattle to Joseph. They brought horses, and asses, and flocks, and herds and for these, Joseph gave them bread. He fed them with bread all that year, for the cattle which they had given him.

But the next year they came to him in great distress, again. They said, 'We will not hide from my lord that not only all our money is gone, but also we have no more cattle ; for we have brought all to my lord. And, now, there is nothing left us but our bodies and our land. Why should we die before your eyes, and why should our land be all wasted ? If you will give us bread, then we will give you our land, and we ourselves will be servants to Pharaoh. Give us seed also, that we may sow the land ; so we shall live and not die, and the land will not be wasted.'

And Joseph agreed to this. He bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine was so sore. So the land became Pharaoh's.

But all the land that belonged to the priests, Joseph did not buy ; for King Pharaoh fed them himself during all that time of famine, and he would not take their fields in payment.

Then Joseph said unto the people, 'Behold, I have bought you this day, and your land, for Pharaoh. Lo, here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. But in the time of harvest you shall give one portion of your crops to Pharaoh, and four portions you may keep for yourselves. With

part of it you will sow the land again, and the rest shall be for food for your households, and for your little ones.'

And the people answered, 'You have saved our lives ; let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants.'

The people, therefore, sowed seed that year, and God let it spring up abundantly. And the river Nile overflowed its banks again, and once more the ditches and pools were full of water. So that long and dreadful famine came to an end.

But Joseph made it a law, over all the land of Egypt, that the king should always have a fifth part of all the crops that should hereafter be grown in the country. Only the priests were not obliged to give any portion of their harvest to the king. Their lands were their own, and so was everything that grew on them ; for, you remember, Pharaoh would not buy any land that belonged to the priests.

Many years passed away, and Jacob was still living peacefully in the midst of his family in the land of Goshen. And God blessed him and his sons, so that they had great riches ; and they grew and increased in number exceedingly. And Jacob lived in Goshen, in the land of Egypt, seventeen years.

But the time was drawing very near now, when he must die. He felt that he had not long to live, and he was quite ready for his pilgrimage to end ; but he could not bear the thought of being buried

in Egypt. Canaan, the land of promise, was very dear to him ; and there it was he wished his body to lie. So he sent for his son Joseph, and said to him,—

‘If, now, I have found grace in your sight, make me a solemn promise, I pray you, and deal kindly and truly with me. Bury me not, I pray you, in Egypt ; but I will lie with my fathers in the Cave of Machpelah in the land of Canaan ; and you shall carry me out of Egypt, and shall bury me in their burying-place.’

And Joseph answered, ‘I will do as you have said.’

And Jacob said, ‘Make me a very solemn promise.’

Then Joseph made him a very solemn promise. And Israel bowed down his head, and worshipped God.

And it came to pass soon after this, that Jacob became very ill ; and some one told Joseph, saying,—

‘Behold, your father is sick.’

When Joseph heard this, he took his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and left his home at once to go to his father in Goshen.

Then they told Jacob, saying, ‘Behold, your son Joseph is come to see you.’

And Jacob strengthened himself, and sat up on his bed. And he said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared unto me at Beth-el in the land of Canaan, and blessed me. And He said unto me, Behold, I will make your family to increase exceedingly, and

I will make of you a multitude of people ; and I will give this land to your children after you, for an everlasting possession.'

You see how, all his life long, Jacob had prized those glorious promises which God had made to Abraham, and which he himself had inherited. While on his death-bed, his thoughts went back to that sweet and wonderful dream at Beth-el, when, for the first time, he heard God's own voice confirming to him these promises.

After this, in a few simple words, he alluded to the great sorrow of his life. Can you guess which was the greatest grief he had ever known ? Listen to his words, and you will know.

'And as for me,' he went on saying to Joseph, who was listening most attentively to every word spoken by his dear, dying father—'as for me, when I came from Haran, where Laban lived, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan as we were journeying, and when there was yet but a little way to come to Bethlehem. And I buried her there, in the place where she died.'

Now the eyes of Jacob were dim for age, so that he could not see ; but he knew that others were in the room with him besides Joseph. Perhaps he had remarked the sound of strange footsteps, when Ephraim and Manasseh came in with their father, for Jacob asked,—

'Who are these ?'

And Joseph said unto his father, 'They are my two sons, whom God has given me in this place.'

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And Jacob said, 'Bring them, I pray you, unto me, and I will bless them.'

And Joseph brought them near to his father, who kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said unto Joseph, 'I had not thought to see your face again; and, lo, God has shown me your children also.'

Then Joseph took away his sons from their dying grandfather's loving embrace, and he bowed himself before his father, with his face to the earth.

But now the blessing was to be given, and Israel was to lay his hands upon the heads of the two lads. So Joseph took them both, and placed them before his father in such a manner that Jacob's right hand might rest on the head of Manasseh, and his left on the head of Ephraim; for he wished the best blessing to be for Manasseh, his first-born.

Though Jacob could not see, yet he knew what Joseph had done. He did not do, however, as Joseph wished, for he crossed his hands, and placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim, the younger son, and his left hand on Manasseh's head. And he blessed them, and said,—

'God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life-long unto this day, the Angel (Jehovah) who redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.'

When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he held up his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father,—

‘Not so, my father, for this is the first-born ; put your right hand upon his head.’

But his father refused, and said, ‘I know it, my son ; I know it. Manasseh also shall become a people, and he also shall be great ; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his family shall become a multitude of nations.’

Thus Israel blessed the two sons of Joseph that day ; and he said to them, ‘In the time to come, when people shall give a blessing to those to whom they wish well, they shall say, God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh ; for you shall be rich and prosperous.’

How could Jacob tell what would happen to his children's children in future years ? God gave him the power to see into the future. He gave him the spirit of prophecy before his death, and told him what should be the fate of the family of each of his sons.

And Israel said unto Joseph, ‘Behold, I die ; but God shall be with you, and shall bring you again into the land of your fathers. Moreover, I have given to you one portion more than I have given to your brothers, even that which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.’



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This no doubt was the 'parcel of a field,' or piece of ground, which he bought near to the city of Shechem, where he lived for seven years, and which he was obliged to leave after the cruel deed of his two sons Simeon and Levi, when they slew all the men of the city.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE PILGRIMAGE ENDED.

AND Jacob called his sons unto him, and said, 'Gather yourselves together—even all of you—that I may tell you that which shall happen to you in the last days. Gather yourselves together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and hearken unto Israel your father.'

So Jacob's twelve sons came as he desired them to do, and gathered round his bed to hear his dying words.

Then Israel prophesied.

He spoke of each of his sons, beginning with Reuben his first-born ; and they all stood silently round him, listening very intently to his last words. He spoke of their faults, too. He said that Reuben had lost the right of the eldest born, because he had been very wicked ; and because his character was weak and uncertain. He strongly blamed Simeon and Levi for their cruelty in Shechem, and said that their families should suffer for that evil act, and should not be as strong and great as they otherwise would have been, but that they should be divided and scattered.

But of Judah he prophesied great things. He said, 'Judah, you are he whom your brethren shall praise.' There was much that was very noble in the character of Judah, as we have seen ; and Jacob said that he should be a great chief among his brethren, and that his father's children should bow down before him. Moreover, it was of the family of Judah that the Saviour of the world, the Lord Jesus Christ, should be born ; so his tribe was honoured far beyond all others.

And to Joseph,* or rather to his two sons, was given the birthright that Reuben had lost by his sinful folly. For Jacob had said, 'Your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, are mine ; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.'

To each of his twelve sons, by turn, Jacob told what should befall him in the far-off years. And after he had done that, he blessed them all ; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. And he charged them, and said unto them,—

'I am going to die ; bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron, the Hittite ; in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought for a possession of a burying-place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife ; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife ; and there I buried Leah.'

And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons—when he had explained to them

* 1 Chron. v. 1, 2.

all that he wanted them to do—he gathered up his feet into the bed, and died.

His pilgrimage was ended at last. He had reached the holy place to which he had been journeying all his life. His dead body was lying on the bed, but his happy spirit was before the throne of God.

Then Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him. And Joseph commanded his servants, the physicians, to embalm his father's body. Do you know what that means? I will tell you.

I dare say you know that any dead body—whether it is the body of a man, or a beast, or a bird—begins to decay very soon after death; and, at last, when sufficient time has passed away, it turns to dust. But the Egyptians had a way of preserving bodies from decay. They used certain drugs and gums and spices, and used them so skillfully that, to this day, there are Egyptian mummies to be seen which are more than two thousand years old. An embalmed body is called a mummy.

Sometimes dead bodies are embalmed in these days; but the art of embalming is not so well known now, as it was in the time of ancient Egypt.

So the physicians, whose special duty it was to attend to this work, embalmed the dead body of the aged Israel. And his sons, and the Egyptians also, mourned for him seventy days.

But Joseph had not forgotten the promise he had made to his dear old father. He had not for-

gotten how eagerly he had desired to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah; and Joseph was very anxious to carry out his wishes as soon as possible, yet he would not go without the king's permission. So, when the seventy days were past, Joseph spoke unto the house of Pharaoh (that means to the king's family, or to the chief persons in his household), saying,—

‘If now I have found grace in your eyes, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, My father made me make him a very solemn promise, for he said to me, Lo, I die; in my grave which I have digged for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me. Now, therefore, let me go up, I pray you, and bury my father, and I will come back again.’

And Pharaoh said, ‘Go up and bury your father, according as he made you swear’—or promise.

Why did not Joseph speak directly to the king himself, as he had always done before? Why did he now, for the first time, make his request to Pharaoh through some of the king's family?

This was the reason. You remember I told you that Joseph was accustomed to dress, and to wear his hair in the same way that the Egyptians did. They always shaved off the beard, and all the hair that grew on their faces; but when they were mourning for a relative, they were obliged to let the hair grow on their faces again; for they were not allowed to shave then. Now, it was not con-

sidered respectful or proper for the Egyptians to appear before their king unshaved ; so Joseph would not venture before him till all the mourning was ended, and till he might shave the hair off his face as before.

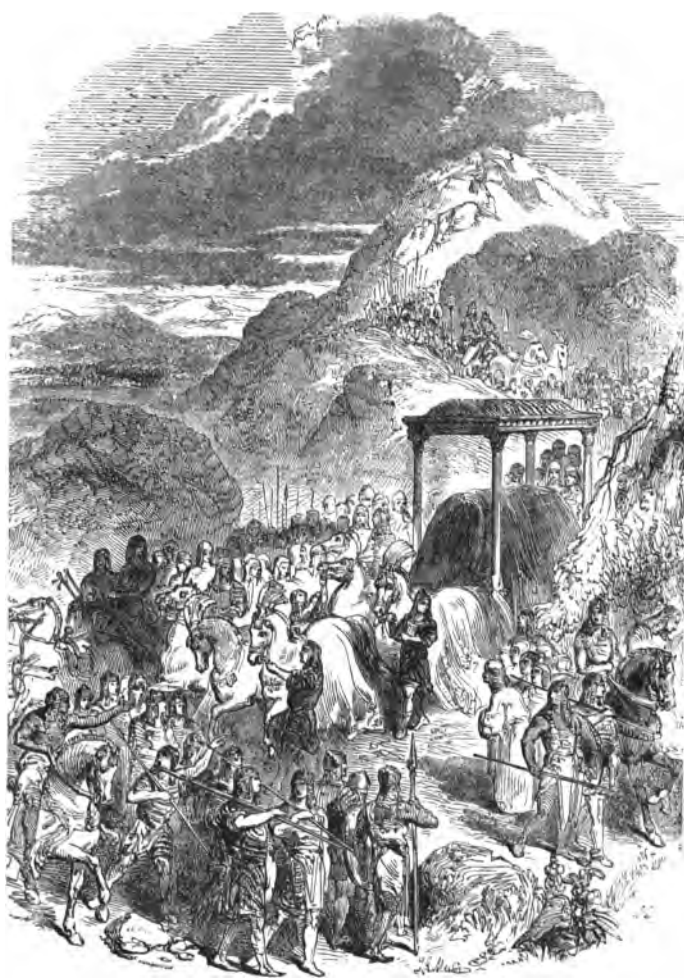
In the same way, in other countries, men might not appear before the king in sackcloth,* which, as you know, was another form of mourning.

As soon as Pharaoh had given Joseph leave to go, he went up to bury his father. And with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders (or chief persons) of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. All the house of Joseph went too, and all his brethren, and his father's house ; only their little ones and their flocks and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with Joseph both chariots and horsemen—an armed guard to watch over them in case they should meet with dangers on the road—and it was a very great company.

What a wonderful sight it must have been ! There were Egyptian warriors, officers of the king, gentlemen of the court, and men of the highest rank in the land of Egypt, all doing honour to the memory of the Hebrew patriarch, by accompanying the sons and grandsons of Israel on their funeral march to Canaan.

They came at last to the promised land, and there they mourned with a great and very sore lamentation. For seven days they mourned and

* Esther, iv. 2.



wept, because the great shepherd chief was dead. And the people of Canaan looked on in wonder. Seventeen years before they had seen Jacob setting off in Egyptian waggons, with all his sons, and all his possessions, to go and live in the land of Goshen; now his dead body was brought back with much love, and great honour, to be buried with his father and his grandfather.

‘This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians,’ they said. They could not understand how it was that the Egyptians should care so much for a Hebrew chief. But it was out of sympathy and respect to Joseph—to Joseph, to whom they owed so much—that all the great men of Egypt came and joined in the funeral procession.

Then the sons of Israel buried their father in the land of Canaan, as he had commanded them. They laid him down very tenderly in the Cave of Machpelah which Abraham had bought for a burying-place. You remember it was the only piece of ground that Abraham had ever bought in the promised land.

When this solemn duty was done, Joseph returned into Egypt, he and his brethren, and all those who went up with him to bury his father. But Joseph’s brothers were not at ease. They were afraid, now their father was dead, that Joseph would revenge himself upon them, for all their cruelty and unkindness to him when he was a boy. They said,—

‘Joseph will hate us, and he will certainly

punish us for all the evil which we did unto him.'

So they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, 'Your father did command us before he died, saying, So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray you, now, the trespass of your brethren, and their sin; for they did unto you evil. And now, we pray you, forgive the sin of the servants of the God of your father.'

When Joseph heard this message he wept. His heart was so true, and so tender and loving, that he could not understand how it was that his brothers did not believe in his complete forgiveness.

And his brothers went to him, and fell down before his face; and they said, 'Behold, we are your servants.'

And Joseph said unto them, 'Fear not; for am I in the place of God?' He meant to say, Do not be afraid of me, only fear God. 'But as for you, though you thought to do me evil, God meant it for good, that many people might be saved alive, during that time of famine. Now, therefore, fear you not; I will take care of you and of your little ones.'

And he comforted them, and spoke kindly to them.

And Joseph lived in Egypt, he and all his father's house. And God blessed him there, and prospered him, and he saw his grandchildren, and great grandchildren, growing up around him.

But when he was a hundred and ten years old, he said unto his brothers,—

‘I am dying; and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which He promised to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.’

And Joseph made the children of Israel promise that, when the time should come for them to leave Egypt and return to Canaan, they should not forget to take his dead body with them, and to bury him in the promised land.

‘God will surely visit you,’ he said, ‘and you shall carry up my bones from here.’

So Joseph died. And they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.

But they did not bury him there. Faithful to their promise, they waited till they should leave the country where they had already sojourned so long.

They little knew *how* long it would be before they should see the beautiful land of Canaan! They little thought that bitter sorrow, and trouble, and slavery were before them, and that the Egyptian people, who were now so kind, would most cruelly oppress them.

But God was very good to them. He never for one moment forgot them, neither did He forget His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When the right time had come, He took them out of the hands of those who were so cruelly ill-using them, and brought them out of the land of Egypt with a strong arm, and with many wonderful miracles.

The account of the journeyings of the children of Israel from Egypt to Canaan is a very strange and wonderful story. When you shall hear what great things God did for them, and yet how disobedient and ungrateful they often were—how unbelieving and complaining—you will wonder how God could have borne with them so patiently. He *could not* have borne with them if He had not been a God of love.

When at last, about two hundred years after Joseph died, the children of Israel reached the land of Canaan, they buried him in Shechem, in that parcel of ground which Jacob had bought for a hundred pieces of silver, and which he afterwards gave to Joseph as the one portion more than his brothers had received.

As the patriarchs of old called all their life a pilgrimage—a journey to a holy place—so our life should be a pilgrimage too. Our blessed Lord, when He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven to prepare a place for those who love and obey Him. We all wish to reach the promised land, we all pray to be guided there at last ; but remember, we must watch as well as pray. There are many dangers on the road, for Satan is always trying to hinder us, and to lead us wrong. And often, alas ! he makes us take a wrong step.

What should we do when we find we have fallen into sin ? We should not rest a moment till we have asked God to forgive us, for His dear Son's sake. We should ask Him to make us hate

all sin, and to give us more grace for the future. And when we have so prayed, *meaning what we say*, we should not be distrustful as Joseph's brothers were. Joseph was grieved when he found they did not believe in his forgiveness ; and the Holy Spirit is grieved when we do not believe in the Saviour's love.

There is a verse in the Bible which says, ' If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' May God wash away all your sins, dear children, for the sake of Jesus Christ who died to save you !

THE END.

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